A

PACKET for YOUTH,

OR

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY

drawn from the mind.

By a LADY.

The most insurmountable, as well as the most usual obstacle to our belief, arises from our passions, appetites, and interests; for faith being an act of the will as much as of the understanding, we oftener disbelieve for want of inclination, than want of evidence.

SOAME JENYNS.

HANLEY.

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PREFACE.

IT will be readily perceived that the following Sheets make no pretenſion to learning, extenſive reading, or even methodical argument; they are no more than a few thoughts, thrown (without much attention to method) into a catechetical form, with a view of aſſiſting young perſons, in deducing from a ſtudy of Scripture ſuch reflections as will ſatisfy them that the Bible is indeed a divine revelation. At a time when the truth of chriſtianity is daringly attacked by ſcorners on the one hand; and as bravely defended by believers of eminent literary attainments on the other; it perhaps may be rendering ſome ſervice to Youth, to ſhew them that proofs of the divine authority of the Scriptures, though they may be illuſtrated by, yet are not neceſſarily dependent on ſuperior talents, or academical advantages; but are found level with the perceptions of every

rational being, who will make the ſame honeſt uſe of his reaſon, which he does in eſtimating the evidences of any other ſpecies of fact. Under this perſuaſion, and with a hope of being in ſome degree uſeful, the work is offered to the public; and the writer truſts that thoſe who may look with favour on the attempt, will not ſeverely criticiſe the execution.—It is thought, that the catechetical form will relieve the ſeeming dulneſs, of a religious eſſay, to leſs ſerious and attentive minds. It is alſo hoped that the queſtions are ſuch as moſt Youth, will underſtand, and feel the importance of. What the anſwers are, muſt be left with the candid reader to determine.

M. P.

TO THE READER.

THE modeſty of our authoreſs, has prevailed on her to conceal both her name and reſidence. But while I willingly ſerved her to the utmoſt of my ability, in ſuperintending the preſs, I was reluctant to ſend her production into the world, perfectly Anonymous. My name indeed, will be but of little ſervice to her, out of a very contracted sphere: But where I am unknown, it will not be injurious. To the few, with whom my recommendation will weigh any thing, I ſhall juſt ſay, Much praiſe is due to her, for the care and accuracy with which ſhe has compiled, and caſt into a new form, the beſt thoughts, of the wiſeſt and beſt of men, on this Subject. Originality ſhe does not wiſh to claim.—On ſome trifling particulars, perhaps I may differ in Judgement from her. But theſe are ſo few and unimportant, that they will not hinder my cordially recommending the whole to the attentive peruſal of thoſe for whom it is intended; Serious Youth. If theſe, of both Sexes, read more upon this ſubject, they would find more pleaſure in it, than they imagine; the objections of Deiſts would make ſlighter impreſſions on their minds; and truth would yield them more delicious entertainment, than was ever obtained from the empty bombaſt of canting noveliſts. Doubtleſs for the wiſeſt reaſons, Scripture forbids our pious females to lecture us from the Pulpit. But while we have fair politicians, hiſto-

rians, and poets, no good reaſon can be aſſigned, why one ſhould not be permitted to talk with us from the preſs, on the ſubject of Religion. Ye critics, ſpare her, not only in deference to her Sex, but alſo to the ſublimity of her theme. Ye females, who are not yet rendered, by the faſcinating gaieties of life, totally indifferent whether the Bible is truth or a lie; hear her. You ſhall find that the moſt deciſive evidences of our religion, are not too myſterious for you to comprehend; nor its ſyſtem too gloomy for you to enjoy.

Hanley, March, 1799,

ROBERT LITTLE.

A

PACKET for YOUTH, &c.

WHAT IS YOUR IDEA OF THE VISIBLE FRAME OF NATURE

It is the work of an all perfect ſelf exiſtent, Being.

WHENCE DO YOU CONCLUDE THUS?

From the difficulty and abſurdity, which attend every other ſyſtem of inference. I find it impoſſible to conceive of matter as ſelf-created, or communicating to itſelf life and motion; but my rational perceptions eaſily lead to the apprehenſion of a Firſt Cauſe. Which Firſt Cauſe muſt neceſſarily be ſelf-exiſtent and eternal. Alſo I perceive that the works of creation, every where exhibit proofs of infinite power and wiſdom. Hence the light of nature teaches me that the Firſt Cauſe of all things (God) is an eternal, omniſcient, and omnipotent Being.

WHAT

WHAT IS MAN?

A creature, partaking of the animal life in common with the brutes; but raiſed far above them in the dignity of his nature, by the faculties of mind, or the rational ſoul; and being an intellectual and moral agent, he is therefore immortal and accountable.

DOES THE LIGHT OF NATURE SUGGEST TO YOU THAT MAN IS IMMORTAL?

Yes, I cannot but be ſenſible that man is endowd with a principle, which is far ſuperior in its nature to that of his corporeal frame. I mean his intellectual powers, between which and the conſtitution of the human body, there is evidently ſo vaſt a diſproportion as ſhews them to be of different natures and tendency. The body in common with that of Brutes attains a point of perfection which it cannot paſs, but returns to imbecility, and ſinks into diſſolution. But it is not ſo with the mind, which knows no boundary of progreſſive improvement; and might be ſaid to remain unaffected by bodily changes; for though we ſometimes ſee that corporal pains and diſeaſes derange the mental powers, they are rather diſturbed, than impaired; and the energies of thought, though leſs regular, are certainly not leſs vigorous. Even at the

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verge of life, when the vital flame quivers in its ſocket, and the bodily organs are incapable of expreſſing the ſenſations of the ſoul; the reflective principle is not inert, but generally ſpeaking is proved to be as active as at any former period. Again the body may be confined to one place; to a rood of ſpace; but human thoughts fly off in boundleſs excurſion, and rove at large through the immenſity of ſpace. The term of human life, is a point ſcarcely perceptable in the extent of time; but the mind of man diſdaining the narrow limits of mortal duration, embraces paſt, preſent and to come; and makes the whole compaſs of time its own. To what purpoſe are faculties like theſe beſtowed on man, if the little ſpan of human life terminate his exiſtence? Brutes by the property of inſtinct alone, ſubſerve the ends of animal being, better perhaps than men in general do by the poſſeſſion of rational powers; at leaſt endowments of a leſs exalted kind would have been adequate to all the ends of ſocial being; had that been the *ultimatum* of human nature. Wherefore than this waſte of powers; this ſuperfluity of intellectual excellence? Surely then I muſt conclude that the Creator has diſplayed an uſeleſs liberality in the formation of our ſpecies, which is folly or impiety in the abſtract; or I muſt believe that we have within us a principle, which

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can never die: An immortal eſſence, which cannot know annihilation.

WHENCE DO YOU GROUND THE OPINION, THAT MAN IS AN ACCOUNTABLE BEING?

I conclude that man is an accountable being, becauſe he poſſeſſes the faculty of free will. If an object be preſented to the underſtanding he is capable of reaſoning and reflecting on its nature and tendency and finally of chuſing or rejecting according to his inclination: therefore I heſitate not to conclude, that he is accountable for his moral actions. But further, the light of reaſon which teaches the being of God, ſuggeſts alſo the idea of moral juſtice; or the neceſſary exiſtence of a principle, which maintains order and beauty in the works of God; by aſſigning and preſerving to all things their proper effect, and eſſential properties. According to which conception, virtue cannot be wretched, nor vice happy. Yet in the preſent conſtitution of human affairs; this beautiful order of things is reverſed; virtue being often depreſſed by adverſity, and vice on the other hand crown'd with proſperity. Therefore, I am perſuaded that ſuch a diſpoſition of affairs, furniſhes reaſon with a cogent argument in favour of the opinion, that there will be a ſtate of final retribution: When the

human

human race as moral agents, ſhall ſeverally anſwer for deeds done in the body; and virtue and vice, reinſtated in their juſt and natural order, ſhall reſpectively operate in their characteriſtic energies of happineſs and miſery, on every individual mind. Accordingly, I find that the reaſonableneſs and probability of future rewards and puniſhments, have been admitted by all deſcriptions of men; as a ſort of univerſal ſentiment expreſſed by various metaphors and figures: Whether as among ſome civilized heathens, the human imagination has portrayed a Tartarus and Elyſium; or with untutored Indians, has depicted its heaven behind ſome cloud cap't diſtant mountain. The idea is virtually the ſame; and ſhews that the natural bent of unſophiſticated reaſon, leads to the belief of exiſtence and retribution beyond the grave.

IF MAN BE AN IMMORTAL AND ACCOUNTABLE BEING, WHAT IS HIS BEST INTEREST?

His beſt Intereſt, obviouſly conſiſts in the ſecuring the favour and friendſhip of the Deity; on whom he neceſſarily depends, both for being and well being.

HOW MAY HE DO THIS?

By acting conformably to the will of Deity.

IS REASON COMPETENT TO DISCOVER THAT WILL?

I conclude not. Becauſe reaſon being a common property of the human ſpecies, it muſt have produced a uniformity of ſentiment in this grand concern: Whereas there is no one point of moral ſpeculation, wherein the opinions of mankind, have been ſo various and oppoſite, as concerning the nature of Deity; and the mode of ſervice to be rendered him.

GIVE SOME PROOF OF THIS?

I need only refer you to a review of the habitable world at this day; as exhibited by travellers of the beſt information and credit. From which it appears, that except in what is called Chriſtendom, there exiſt no rational ideas of God; or the worſhip due unto him. And the variety of abſurd or horrid ſuperſtitions, obtaining in different nations, are a proof that the human underſtanding, is incapable of forming any reaſonable deciſion, on thoſe important points.

IS NOT YOUR INFERENCE UNFAIR, SEEING, THAT EXCEPT IN THE PARTS CALLED CHRISTENDOM, MANKIND ARE NOT ENLIGHTENED BY SCIENCE AND LITERATURE?

To this I might reply: That if juſt apprehenſions of Deity, depend on ſome previous degree of mental attainment, then are they not the genuine product of ſimple reaſon

ſon; and the poſition is tacitly conceded; that man by nature is ignorant of God.—However to examine the evidence of facts, let us trace the thread of hiſtory back to the remoteſt ages; and a ſmall portion of reflection will ſuffice to convince us, that the human mind, when refined by ſcientific and liberal attainments, was no leſs unacquainted with divine truth, then when in a ſavage and uncultivated ſtate. Ancient hiſtory, repreſents Egypt as the cradle of learning, and the nurſery of intellect; yet the Egyptians were among the moſt ſenſeleſs idolators: They not only worſhipping brute beaſts, but reptiles, and even vegetables. In the Aſſyrian empire, celebrated for political grandeur, the intellectual energies ſhone with a high degree of ſcientific ſplendour. Here it was that aſtronomy had birth. Yet the men who could calculate the motions and number of the heavenly bodies; were themſelves enſnared by their very knowledge. Their ſcheme of judicial Aſtrology, rendered them the ſlaves of ſuperſtition, and the abject victims of a ſyſtem which imagination had armed at all points with terror. Here we behold the human intellect, making bold advances to the arcanum of truth; yet unhappily it ſloped ſhort, and inſtead of diſcovering the one infinite intelligence; it abſurdly inveſted matter with an imaginary

divinity.

divinity.—What ſtronger proof can be demanded, of the imbecility of reaſon, in the appreciation of divine things?—The Phœnicians, as a maritime people, are firſt on record. Their commerce, extended to every port of the then known world, preſuppoſes an advanced ſtate of the arts and ſciences: Yet here alſo, idolatry prevailed in a variety of horrid ſuperſtitions; and civilized humanity, ſcrupled not the offering of human ſacrifices. Come we next to the polite ages of greece and Rome; when ſcience and learning were at the height, and Philoſophy had generally ſoftened the fierceneſs of human nature. Yet amidſt all the advantages of mental refinement, chaotic darkneſs brooded over the mind in reſpect of divine knowledge; and the moſt enlightened intellect was clouded with error and confuſion. An almoſt endleſs catalogue of male and female Idols, divided the religious homage of mankind. Which multitudinous group, conſiſted of dead men deified; divine attributes, moral virtues, and human paſſions perſonified. And to moſt of thoſe imaginary deities, ſuch actions and characters were aſcribed, as an honeſt Greek or Roman, would not have had imputed to himſelf: While the myſterious rites connected with thoſe ſuperſtitions; were diſgraceful to reaſon, and repugnant to humanity. What then muſt have been the

moral

moral character of mankind, when religion itſelf inculcated every ſpecies of licentiouſneſs and ſenſual impurity?—And yet, ſuch is the well known picture of human nature, during the lapſe of four thouſand Years.—But where was then the boaſted power of natural religion, of which we hear ſo much in our day? Let us not however be amuſed with figures and modes of ſpeech, without appreciating their real and preciſe meaning. What then is natural religion? I know it is common with many, to confound the idea of it, with that of deiſm. As though the rational notions, which ſome unbelievers entertain of the divine eſſence and character, were indeed the religion of nature.—But this is a great miſtake. A European infidel, is not the genuine pupil of nature. He is the creature of education; and local cuſtom has taught him to blend his rational conceptions of Deity, with the earlieſt aſſociation of ideas. Would we know what natural religion is, we muſt enquire how much of divine truth is apprehended by the intuition of native ideas alone; and I believe it will be found amounting to this:—viz. Every human individual doth from the conſciouſneſs of exiſtence, naturally and neceſſarily conceive, of ſome ſupreme preexiſtent cauſe of being: Whom he is morally bound to worſhip; and whoſe goodwill it is his intereſt to ſecure. This is a

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ſentiment, common both to the ſavage and the philoſopher: And this I underſtand to be ſtrictly and properly, what is called natural religion. For all beyond, is conveyed to the mind by external agency. And ſimple reaſon having drawn this grand outline, can proceed no further. It being undeniable, that natural religion has never been able to aſcertain the eſſential properties of its object; or to preſcribe a ſyſtem of religious worſhip, adapted to the moral condition and intellectual nature of man.—Therefore from the univerſal experience of mankind, I infer that there are no powers inherent in the human mind, which are competent to diſcover the knowledge of God, and the mode of acceſs to his favour.—Nor is this concluſion at all invalidated, by the proofs which may be adduced of a better light having here and there been apparent in the heathen world. Enlightened individuals of different countries, and at different periods, have diſcovered juſt conceptions of God: While the people every where continued immerſed in the groſſeſt Idolatry. And you muſt allow that a juſt eſtimate of the natural properties of reaſon, can only be formed by a ſtandard compriſing all the variations of moral or ſocial condition.—This ſtandard, is none other than the common maſs of mankind. And can no more be affected by a few individul examples of

former

former ages, than at this day the ordinary meaſure of the human intellect, is affected by the genius of a Newton.—But to bring the queſtion to a more deciſive iſſue, I demand if there exiſt any ſatisfactory evidences, that the accurate perceptions of thoſe individuals were derived from their own innate ſtock of ideas.—So far from this being proved, there are reaſonable grounds for believing, that in whatever degree, any juſt apprehenſions of God have obtained in the heathen world, they were drawn from another ſource, than the mere light of nature.

IF IT BE MANS TRUE INTEREST TO SECURE THE FAVOUR OF DEITY, AND REASON YIELDS NO DECISIVE DIRECTION TO THAT END; MIGHT NOT A DIVINE REVELATION HAVE BEEN EXPECTED?

I judge ſuch an expectation to be perfectly agreeable to reaſon. For altho' the human mind has deviſed a variety of conceptions concerning the nature and will of Deity, this ſeems a point in which the ſentiments of all mankind have always met. The ancient mythology of moſt nations, ſuggeſts under one figure or another, the idea of moral renovation to be effected by ſome ſpecial divine agency; and the multitude in every country, has ever been ready to admit the groſſeſt abſurdities, which art or ambition has impoſed under colour of divine ſanction. This very credulity, which has every where characteriſed our

ſpecies,

ſpecies, is to me at leaſt, a tacit proof that the preſentiments of man univerſally concur in the reaſonableneſs and probability of a divine revelation. For how is ſuch a general diſpoſition to be accounted for, otherwiſe than by ſuppoſing it a ſimple dictate of the mind; that the exigencies of mankind both require, and from the kindneſs of heaven it might be expected to receive, ſome ſupernatural illumination as to the purpoſes of moral conduct and happineſs.

BY WHAT MARKS, WOULD YOU DISTINGUISH A DIVINE REVELATION, FROM THE INVENTIONS OF HUMAN IMPOSTURE?

A divine revelation, is to be diſcriminated by its own internal characters, anſwering to certain perceptions within the breaſt of the object. In the firſt place, it will make known things above reaſon; for this, the notion of a revelation neceſſarily implies. And I have no good grounds, for ſuppoſing that to be a ſpecial meſſage from heaven, which makes known no more than was previouſly to be apprehended, by natural intellect. But altho' the things revealed may be above reaſon, they cannot be contrary to it; for being addreſſed to intellectual and moral beings they muſt have a correſpondence with the rational preconceptions of thoſe beings. A man, muſt be enabled to find in every propoſition, an agree-

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ment with the ſimple ideas of his own mind. As for inſtance, diſcoveries may be made of the divine eſſence and perfections, which greatly ſurpaſs all that I could naturally have conceived on the ſubject; yet my intellectual perceptions, muſt immediately recognize the features of truth in thoſe diſcoveries; and be ready to aſſent that thus and thus muſt Deity neceſſarily be. Secondly, I ſuppoſe a ſpecial divine revelation, to have ſomething more than a ſpeculative end. The moral condition of man requires, and therefore I look for, an explicit declaration of the will of God, reſpecting the terms on which his favour ſhall be beſtowed on the creature. This, I conſider as the prerogative of abſolute ſovereignty; and the terms themſelves, as primarily reſolvable into the pleaſure of the lawgiver. Nevertheleſs, though the mode of acceptance, be ſuch as reaſon would not have anticipated, it muſt be that in which reaſon can diſcern all her preconceived properties of God. Like his operations in the viſible kindom of nature, there muſt be wiſdom in the contrivance, ſublimity of deſign, and utility in the end: There can be no defective principle, no contingent conſequence, but immutable efficiency, order, and beauty. And having thus far diſcovered an agreement with the firſt principles of natural religion, I look for a conſiſtency of the

preſcribed

preſcribed rule, with what the revelation itſelf unfolds of the divine character. That is to ſay, the infinite holineſs, juſtice, truth, and mercy of God, which muſt ſeverally be illuſtrated by the plan, in a manner calculated to draw forth the admiration and love of all created intelligences; conſequently, the revealed will of God, muſt have immediate reference to the well-being of man: Providing for his moral exigencies, and reſpecting the purpoſes of ſocial order, on principles adapted to all times, places, and poſſible contingencies of human life. And finally, it will tend to the effecting that moral perfection, in which conſiſts the honour and happineſs of an intellectual being, through every ſtage of exiſtence. Thus much, the light of reaſon teaches me to expect, in a plan, purporting to have God for its author. Whenever therefore, I find thoſe preconceptions anſwered, I have a rational aſſurance that the revelation is divine

ARE THOSE INTERNAL CHARACTERS, TO BE FOUND IN ANY BOOK NOW EXTANT?

Yes. They eminently appear, in that collection of ancient writings, which we denominate the Bible.

PLEASE TO ADDUCE SOME PARTICULAR PROOF OF THIS?

The Bible teaches me, that the world and all

all things therein, were created by the immediate will of one ſelf-exiſtent, infinite, Intelligence. The account is briefly related, but the moſt elaborate piece of human oratory, could not have been ſo ſuitable to the ſubject, as the dignified ſimplicity of ſcripture language; and I have no heſitation in believing the moſaic hiſtory of creation, to be the only true one. Not merely, becauſe it is a more ſublime theory of the origin of nature, than any which has been attempted; but becauſe it is that which eaſily falls in with, and aſſimilates itſelf to my rational perceptions. All the conjectures of heathen philoſophy on the ſubject, leave the underſtanding involved in gloomy uncertainty; and every hypotheſis deviſed by man, terminates in intellectual chaos. But in the ſcriptural account, there is nothing but what blends with our moſt natural conceptions; which admitting the principle of Deity, as a ſelf-evident axiom; adopt with perfect eaſe the idea of a divine, ſelf-active, energy calling the material world into exiſtence. Again, there are conveyed by the ſacred writings, the moſt auguſt and amiable ideas of the divine nature and perfections, that can poſſibly enter a human ſoul: Yet theſe ſhe can make her own, without the ſmalleſt labour, or extraordinary exerciſe of her faculties. The ſcriptures declare that the ſupreme Being, is eſſentially wiſe, powerful,

juſt,

juſt, merciful, holy, and benevolent in an infinite degree. That he is from eternity, to eternity, without variation, or ſhadow of change. That his immenſity fills all ſpace; ſo that there is no part of the viſible, or inviſible creation, to which he is not preſent; and being thus eſſentially preſent to all the works of his hands, he is the active ſuſtaining principle of matter in all its forms: The Being of all beings. In him we live and move; and conſequently all things are open to his pervading eye; and no motion of the heart, can eſcape his cognizance. Therefore with reſpect to his preſcience, there is nothing accidental: With reſpect to his providence there is nothing contingent. In his hands, are the iſſues of the human will; and the courſe of the moral world, receives from him final direction. The meaneſt individual, is the object of his peculiar concern; and not a ſparrow falls to the ground, in the remoteſt deſert of creation, without regard of the ever preſent Deity. Theſe are in general, the ſublime apprehenſions which are ſuggeſted by the book of revelation; and both my intellectual perceptions, and moral feelings, receive them as harmonious ideas. For though in contemplating the divine nature by the light of reaſon alone, I muſt have fallen far ſhort of aſcertaining theſe, his perfections; yet being revealed, I am conſcious that there would

would be abſurdity in denying, or doubting, any one propoſition which the ſacred writings, advance on the exalted ſubject.

PROCEED TO THE BIBLE HISTORY OF MAN?

The ſcriptures inform me, that man was created in the image of God. This image, or likeneſs, I underſtand as conſiſting in the intellectual and moral powers. The human underſtanding, was a ray, or particle of the infinite Intelligence: And the active powers communicated to the mind, bore a reſemblance of kind, to the eſſential properties of the Creator. But man alſo reſembled his maker, in the holy bias of thoſe moral powers. As there was no error, or darkneſs clouding the underſtanding; ſo there was nothing but perfect rectitude in the will and affections: And conſequently all the paſſions and animal properties of his nature, were in exact ſubordination to the dictates of right reaſon. Philoſophy tells us that thus man ought to be; and ſcriptures declare that thus he actually was, in his original eſtate. And I am perſuaded that it muſt of neceſſity have been ſo; becauſe, as according to our natural notions of order, there muſt be a moral conformity of the creature, to the Creator; I cannot conceive, of an infinitely perfect being, acting to the prejudice of order in any part

of

of his univerſal kindom. For this implies imperfections and abſurdity; which I ſee by the light of reaſon cannot relate to God: Therefore, Man muſt have been created upright and ſinleſs, as the ſacred writings affirm he was. In ſuch a ſtate of harmonious relations, phyſical, or natural evil could have had no exiſtence; the body of man was ſuitable to the nature of his intellectual capacity: That is, capable of immortal perfection and duration. To which property, the priſtine conſtitution of the elements was probably ſubſervient. The temperature of the air, being adapted to the moſt ſalutary purpoſes of human exiſtence; no baneful vapours, or atmoſpheric changes affected the animal frame: and the fruits of the earth, inhaling the vital ſpirit of nature, adminiſtered in the compleateſt degree to the health and pleaſure of man; without that tribute of toilſome induſtry he is now condemned to pay, for the ſuſtenance of a waſting body. Such, I apprehend, was the paradiſaical ſtate of the earth, at its creation; and the ſame idea has alſo obtained among many of the ancient heathens; which ſeems to have been the reſult of a common ſentiment, that thus it might rationally be ſuppoſed, the frame of nature, would iſſue from the hands of creative wiſdom and goodneſs: Or it muſt have been a fragment of tradition, derived from the earlieſt ages, that ſuch was

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originally the happy conſtitution of things.

But I not only obſerve conſiſtency with reaſon, in the main outline of ſcripture narrative; I alſo notice, ſeveral minute ſhades of characteriſtic propriety, which beſpeak the original portrait of man touched by a divine hand. The motions of the ſoul running in a ſmooth, equal tide, undiſturbed by paſſion, unmoved by hope or fear ariſing from external viciſſitude, may at firſt ſight convey an idea of liſtleſs apathy: But Adam in Paradiſe, found extatic employment for the nobleſt faculties of his nature. Mention is made of the tree of life, of which he might eat and live for ever. But we pervert reaſon and common ſenſe, by ſuppoſing that this language implies, any vital properties peculiar to this fruit; or that Adam would aſcribe the duration of his being, to its inherent virtue. It was ſimply a ſacramental pledge of the divine goodneſs and truth; requiring on the part of Adam, a lively exerciſe of faith, or a believing aſſurance, that the Almighty would not fail of making good that promiſe, of which the tree was conſtituted a ſenſible ſign. As often therefore, as he ate of that fruit, he would be excited to renewed exerciſes of love and gratitude, to the bounteous Creator; ſenſibly taſte the ſweetneſs of his benevolence, and immutable faithfulneſs; and feel the delightful ſenſations of love, confidence, ad-

miration and joy, diffuſed anew through all his rational powers. The prohibition alſo reſpecting the tree of knowledge, had a peculiar ſuitableneſs to the end intended. That obedience was the indiſpenſible duty of the creature, none will deny. But how could that obedience, have poſſeſſed the nature of moral excellence, if attended with no evidence of free agency? Some viſible teſt was therefore neceſſary to the character and condition of Adam; in order to elucidate the conformity of his will to the principles of right reaſon, which ſuggeſted obedience to the ſupreme Governor, as eſſential to the being and beauty of order. The forbidden fruit, was this teſt. A point of indifference in itſelf, but of great importance as the appointed criterion of human virtue: It was aptly ſtiled the tree of the kowledge of good and evil, becauſe by it the good, or evil of mans heart, would be clearly aſcertained.

The ſacred hiſtory, goes on to relate the fall of man from his original rectitude: An event, by no means to be conſidered as a contingence which divine preſcience did not foreſee, and divine wiſdom could not prevent. We indeed have no faculties, by which we can comprehend how Adam could have been reſtrained from this rebellion, without being deprived of the property of free will; but it is probable, there are many more pefections in Deity, then can

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enter into our conceptions of him; and we know not in what mode thoſe perfections may be diſplayed, in other orders of created intelligences. It is therefore impious to ſay, that the Creator could not otherwiſe have diſpoſed the order of things, conſiſtently with the nature of a free agent. But we may confidently affirm, that he would not have permitted moral evil a place in his works, had he not intended thereby, to advance his own glory and the intereſts of his univerſal kingdom. Adam then was left to fall in conſequence of his free will, according to the foreknowledge of God. He ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and thereby incurred the threatened penalty of death. Death intellectual and corporeal, for both are implied. But in order to underſtand, in what manner an intellectual death may be effected; it is only neceſſary to conſider, what is the nature of intellectual life. I apprehend, that every intelligent being is a part of Deity. A partaker, in characteriſtic degree, of his ſpiritual eſſence. Brutes have the faculty of apprehending ſenſible objects and actions, within their ſphere of perception; but man only, is endowed with the capacity of admitting ſpiritual conceptions; and muſt depend for the ſupport and vigour of that capacity, on a communication with the infinite Mind, its immediate ſource. In the ſame manner (to borrow a metaphor

from the material world) as the branches of a tree, are invigorated by union with the parent root. Or as the freſhneſs and motion of a ſtream, depend on renewed ſupplies from its head or fountain. A human ſoul, has no proper life but as it is united to and maintains, communion with God; by a realizing ſenſe of his preſence and perfections, a conſtant derivation of his influence, and a conſciouſneſs of his favour and approbation. And all which perverts, or deſtroys this union, doth in effect ſuppreſs the intellectual life. The ſin of Adam did this. For what is ſin, but a withdrawing of the ſoul from God its ſource and centre. When this is done, the intellectual perceptions are darkened; the ſupreme excellence ceaſes to be viewed as the ſovereign good; the mind is no longer in a capacity to diſcern, aſpire to, or reliſh ſpiritual objects and enjoyments; the ſoul is virtually dead; dead to all the high ends and purpoſes of her being. Now the act of eating the forbidden fruit, was a demonſtration by action, that Adam had thus in ſpirit withdrawn from his God. He had ceaſed to regard him as the ſupreme felicity, the moment he ſuffered himſelf to queſtion, if there might not be a good, abſtract from and independent of God. And from this previous alienation of the rational principle, proceeded the act of rebellion, which ſtamped his character as a

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ſinner. And the ſame is the conſtituent quality of ſin at this day; and the efficient cauſe of all the moral diſorder extant in our world. For why do mankind purſue honor, riches, dominion and ſenſual gratification, in defiance of all ſanctions, human as well as divine; at the expence of every natural and ſocial obligation; and in oppoſition to all the checks of conſcience; but becauſe they imagine, that the ſovereign good lies in the peculiar object of purſuit? And why do they thus err in their judgment of things, but becauſe the underſtanding is darkened? The intellectual life is extinct, being deſtitute of thoſe communications of the Divinity, which are eſſential to its perfection. And in conſequence, the rational powers no more apprehend ſpiritual objects and ſatisfactions, than a dead body is ſenſible of material things. Thus, the Bible affords me the full, ſatisfactory ſolution, of a queſtion which has puzzled ſpeculative men in all ages: Namely, by what means the beauty of moral order, became effaced on this our Globe. Here is a cauſe, fully adequate to the effect: I need ſeek no other. For what hypotheſis, can ſo clearly account for the miſery and confuſion, experienced by mankind, as the ſcripture hiſtory, ſetting forth a free agent obſcuring the luſtre of his intellectual perfections, by a perverſion of his moral powers?

From theſe conſiderations I am led to perceive the wiſdom of the Creator, in annexing the penalty of death to an action evincing the moral degeneracy of man. We know what vaſt extenſive evils may accrue from the ſhort life of one individual: How awful had been the conſequences had human rebels been immortal? I ſuppoſe that the ſubjecting of the animal frame to mortality, required no immediate change in its conſtituent parts, but that we are to look for the operation of the ſentence in natural cauſes. A certain writer obſerves, "that "in the air a univerſal ſpirit is floating, "which penetrates every thing, is incor- "porated with the food we eat, contributes "to our nutrition, and ſupplies the waſte "of the finer fluids: It is highly probable "that in the garden of Eden, the air was "proportioned in ſuch a manner, and the "fruits of the earth were found in ſuch "purity and perfection, that man would "for ever have remained in a ſtate of im- "mortality, had not his paſſions diſturbed "ſo happy a conſtitution." And doubtleſs the ſame body, which by a benign diſpoſition of the elements might have been nouriſhed in perpetual vigour, would be expoſed to diſſolution by a ſuſpenſion of their friendly qualities; and therefore I regard the language of ſcripture, which repreſents the Almighty as curſing the earth for man's

man's ſake, not as implying a vindictive imprecation againſt an unoffending object; but ſimply as a command iſſued by the Great Firſt Cauſe, requiring the concurrence of natural effects, or ſecond cauſes, in the abridgment of human life. In conſequence of which the fruits of the earth deprived in a great meaſure of their alimentary perfection, were to be obtained at the expence of human toil, and the daily waſte of the animal ſpirits; till gradually ſinking beneath the burden of labour, pain and ſorrow, the body returns to its original duſt: Yet there is reaſon to think, that theſe effects of divine diſpleaſure, did not operate in their full force immediately; for the properties of nature ſtill retained ſo much of their priſtine energies, as to nouriſh the life of man through a period of near a thouſand years; an age frequently attained before the flood. But that cataſtrophe effected a more ſenſible change; the whole ſyſtem of creation was diſturbed by the general deluge;* and the groſſer

* Modern attainments in philoſophy, have led ſome to diſpute againſt the univerſality of the deluge, on what they term ſcientific principles. But the attempt diſcovers a poorneſs of conception, or an atheiſtical turn of mind. For ſhall we preſume to limit Omnipotence? Or confine the God of nature; to laws of our preſcribing? The human intellect, active in its powers, and great in its aims, has been able to deviſe ſuch plauſible theories of cauſe and effect, as coincide with its own perceptions of

groſſer particles of matter mixing with the more pure, rendered the earth and its atmoſphere leſs friendly to the purpoſes of animal exiſtence. So that the age of man was reduced to nearly the ſame limits as at preſent.

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of material objects. But will the moſt ſucceſsful ſtudent of nature, preſume to ſay, that he has diſcovered all the principles and ſecret ſprings of her mechanical ſyſtem? Or that matter can poſſeſs no powers or properties, which do not preciſely anſwer to his hypotheſis? On the contrary men of the higheſt talents and ſcientific knowledge, have been ready to confeſs that to reaſon agreeably to the analogy of things, is the utmoſt they can do on ſubjects of this nature; and that after their moſt diligent reſearches, much remains inexplicable to the human underſtanding. Mr. Whiſton, if I miſtake not, has accounted for the univerſal operation of the deluge, by ſuppoſing the earth to have been at that time involved in a collection of watry particles; by the near approach of a Comet: But however this be, or whether the moſt learned, can form any rational conjecture as to the means, it is well known that ſuch diſcoveries have been made in the bowels of the earth, in every part of the Globe, as have enabled ſcientific obſervers to aſcertain the univerſal operation of the deluge, beyond all contradiction. Indeed, I do not ſee how we can queſtion the fact, without acting inconſiſtently with our rational perceptions. For to admit the being of a ſelf-active Deity, as the prediſpoſing cauſe of matter and its properties, and yet to limit his agency in ſecond cauſes, is even more abſurd and irrational than atheiſm itſelf. Some ſuperficial objections, have alſo been urged as to the propriety of aſſigning a religious ſignificancy to the Rainbow; which is known to exiſt in natural cauſes. It is true, we are acquainted with the natural cauſes on which that Phæno-

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WHAT IS YOUR IDEA OF THE BIBLE HISTORY AS IT RELATES TO THE SERPENT?

I underſtand by other parts of the ſacred writings, that ſatan aſſumed the ſhape of the Serpent in order more ſucceſſfully to beguile our firſt parents; and it muſt be confeſſed there was much of plauſibility in the deſign, for what could ſo effectually have deceived them reſpecting the properties of the fruit, as their ſuppoſing they beheld a brute rendered intelligent by the uſe of it? "Ye ſhall not die (ſaid the Serpent) but ye ſhall be as Gods." That is, ye ſhall be exalted in

menon depends; but this by no means proves that ſuch cauſes exiſted before the deluge. On the coutrary, it is reaſonable to conclude that the humid vapours which occaſion this beautiful refraction of the ſolar rays, were communicated to and lodged in the atmoſphere, by the late convulſion of nature. Noah and his Family on quitting the ark, were encouraged to reſume the ordinary buſineſs of human life, by the Almighty aſſuring them that the courſe of the ſeaſons ſhould no more be interrupted, by a ſimilar cataſtrophe And probably, at the inſtant this promiſe was given, their wonder was excited by the ſight of a ſplendid arch embracing the horizon, and their attention was eſpecially directed to it by the following words; "Behold (ſaid the Lord) I do, or, *I have* ſet my bow in the clouds and it ſhall be a ſign to you &c." ſee Geneſis Chap. 9, *Verſe* 13. That is, by the conſtruction of common ſenſe, I have cauſed thoſe watry particles to remain in the air, which produce the meteor, you now behold; and I conſtitute thoſe effects of the flood, a ſign to you and all generations that I will no more deſtroy the earth by water; or interrupt the courſe of nature till the final conſummation of all things.

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the ſcale of beings; and we may naturally think they would thus reaſon within themſelves: There muſt be truth in this aſſertion. 'This beaſt by eating of the fruit has attained the faculty of ſpeech; therefore its effects to us, can be no other than an advancement to angelic perfection.' Should it be aſked, why this ſatanic agency is not expreſſly mentioned in the hiſtory? I anſwer, that doubtleſs Moſes deemed it ſuperfluous, to declare what every reader would take for granted. For although ſome have endeavoured to ſhow, that the doctrine of infernal ſpirits was unknown to the Iſraelites before the Babyloniſh captivity; it is very probably thought, that Moſes himſelf was the author of the book of Job; where we find the ſubject expreſſly treated, not as a novel idea requiring elucidation, but with the familiarity of a well known topic. Concerning the origin of evil ſpirits, we know nothing; and reaſoning is vain on the ſubject. As far as the Bible diſcovers ſpiritual things to us, our underſtanding keeps pace with it, but in ſoaring beyond this limit we are loſt in fable, and the chimeras of imagination. The ſcriptures do not gratify our curioſity on this point, but they every where teach the exiſtence of a ſupernatural adverſary to our race, i e Satan, or the devil; who is ſtyled the God of this world, and repreſented as exerciſing dominion over the greater

ter part of mankind; (indeed over all in the ſtate of nature.) Now I am induced to believe this a true ſtatement of the caſe, by reflecting on what is actually ſeen and experienced in the world. Do not men go greater lengths in impiety and wickedneſs, than it might be thought creatures who have the moral ſenſe ſtamped on their inmoſt feelings could do. From the ignorance and error which ſhroud our intellectual perceptions, in the preſent ſtate, happineſs, or ſelf gratification will be purſued under a variety of imaginary forms, and in numerous eccentric directions; inconſiſtent perhaps with the order and well-being of human ſociety; yet amidſt a thouſand devious lines of conduct, it might be expected we ſhould recognize the characteriſtics of humanity, and be able to ſay, this is man! But how many in diſpoſition and practice, have been the Nero's and Caligula's of our ſpecies? How often, are the animal properties of our being, perverted to exceſſes which the irrational creatures endued with the ſame ſenſitive appetites, are ſtrangers to? Surely, we muſt allow that there is a diabolical tempter, in ſuch inſtances, urging men to crimes beyond the natural bent of human nature; or otherwiſe we muſt confeſs, that the heart of man itſelf is eſſentially diabolical. And I leave modern ſceptics, to chuſe which of the too propoſitions, beſt ſuits their purpoſe;

purpoſe; for one or the other, we are neceſſarily compelled to adopt, by the evidence of ſenſible experience and incontrovertible fact.

WAS IT CONSISTENT WITH THE WISDOM AND GOODNESS OF GOD, TO PERMIT SUCH EXERCISE OF SATANIC AGENCY?

It was conſiſtent with the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, to permit a temporary evil, with a view of deducing therefrom a permanent and infinite good: And that ſuch is the effect of the divine conduct in this tranſaction, will appear by a diligent attention to the ſacred narrative. Adam as the federal head and repreſentative of our race, ſtood as we have already ſeen, originally in a covenant with his Maker; the priveleges of which, were immortal life and felicity; and the requiſition, perfect unerring obedience. We have ſeen this covenant broken, and our firſt parents fatally convinced of the diſtinction between good and evil, as the grand deceiver had equivocally ſuggeſted: Good, loſt; and evil, gained. The pangs of fear, ſhame, remorſe, deſpondency and every tormenting paſſion, took poſſeſſion of thoſe breaſts in which love, peace, joy and each harmonious ſenſation, originally reſided. The mortality entailed on the human race, muſt have been contemplated with ſatisfaction, had the evil of

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ſin reſted here; but the light of the divine countenance was withdrawn from the ſoul, or the intellectual principle; which thenceforth muſt remain cut off from all its native ſprings of bliſs, and enduring the fiery ſenſe of the wrath of Omnipotence, through the everlaſting ages of its exiſtence. At this criſis of ruin, miſery and deſpair, the Almighty graciouſly propoſed that Remedy which it is the main ſcope of all the ſacred writings, to illuſtrate and unfold: It was no other, than a new covenant by which mankind ſhould be reſtored to the favour and friendſhip of God; on the condition of faith in, and acceptance of, the perſon and offices of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. This is the ſum and ſubſtance of the Goſpel, and we have it firſt publiſhed by the Creator himſelf in thoſe words. "The ſeed of the woman ſhall bruiſe the ſerpent's head:" That is, *from thy poſterity ſhall deſcend the Meſſiah, who ſhall counteract the policy and malice of Satan.* The declaration is very conciſe, yet the whole Bible ſubſtantially contains no more. Each and every part of ſcriptnre, being in ſome mode or other, an explanation of the means and manner, by which this promiſed deliverance ſhould be effected. It is probable that Adam had a clear comprehenſion of theſe, however all that we can aſcertain on that point is, that he underſtood his pardon was to be obtained by vicarious oblation;

for we preſently find that ſacrifices had been inſtituted, in which, no doubt, he was taught to conſider the ſlain lamb, as emblematical of a better ſacrifice to be offered for the ſin of the world. This may be clearly gathered from the conduct of Cain and Abel; the one offered ſacrifice, but it conſiſting of the fruits of the ground, ſeems to have been intended only as a ſort of quit rent; an acknowledgement of God as the proprietor of all. Abel brought his *lamb* as a ſin-offering, in the very ſpirit of the inſtitution; viz. with the diſpoſitions of a penitent, relying on the efficacy of the Lord's own appointment, and expecting acceptance only in his preſcribed way: and hence the different lights, in which the two worſhippers were regarded by the Almighty. Here then is the grand doctrine of human redemption by Jeſus Chriſt, primarily declared, and a cordial acquieſcence in the plan, or implicit reliance on the promiſe, (which is virtually the ſame thing,) conſtitutes the way of acceptance preſcribed by our Maker and Judge. This is the new Covenant. And the goſpel, (a word literally ſignifying *glad tidings.*) means no more, than the illuſtrating this new and living way, and ſetting forth its offers and privileges to the apprehenſions of men.

Here I muſt bring to your recollection, what I have already premiſed, as an internal mark or character of a divine revelation:

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That it might be expected to make known, things which are above the penetration of reaſon, yet not contrary to it. The ſcriptural plan of redemption, is that which no human intellect could have deviſed, or conceived. Let us examine then, how far it coincides with our rational preconceptions. In the firſt place, I apprehend that to pardon ſin, is the abſolute prerogative of Deity. Mention is often made of *the rule of right*, in a manner (if I miſtake not,) indicative of ſomething diſtinct from, and independent of the revealed will of God. But in fact, we owe our natural ideas of rectitude, to the perfection of the moral ſenſe; and what is that moral ſenſe, but a tranſcript of the eternal mind, engraven on the heart of every rational individual? Right and wrong, in this reſpect, can have no relative meanings abſtract from the ſubſtance of moral beauty; God himſelf! Conſequently, his will, is the rule of right; and he is the party aggrieved by our deviations from that rule. "Againſt thee, thee only, have I ſinned," muſt every depraved child of Adam ſay; and to thee only it appertains to forgive. I cannot, but deſire to ſtand juſtified before the majeſty of Heaven; but wherewithal ſhall I procure juſtification? Have I at no time of my life, deviated from his will, either in action, intention or deſire? And if I have, what have I to offer as a compenſa-

tion? Preſent repentance, will not do; ſeeing I am ſtill liable to err as before; and am conſcious that on exact ſcrutiny, my beſt works do not come up to that ſtandard of perfect rectitude, of which I have an innate idea: Imperfection, cannot be an equivalent for perfection. Therefore I perceive, that though God may pardon ſin, yet it muſt be by a mere act of grace. But I have other perceptions, which ſhew me that it would be improper for God thus to pardon abſtractedly from certain proviſions, relative to the intereſts of his univerſal kingdom. Which intereſts require, that the remiſſion of human tranſgreſſion be conducive to the honor and glory of the divine character, in all its conceivable attributes: That the moral law, which is the rule of perfection to all intellectual beings, as comprizing unreſerved love of God as ſupreme, and all created objects for his ſake, be illuſtrated, and made honorable: And laſtly, that the pardoned ſinner, be reinſtated in primeval holineſs. Becauſe to remit guilt, and leave the principle of ſin untouched, would effect nothing to the end of order; which reaſon tells me, all the diſpenſations of the Creator's moral government, muſt ultimately ſubſerve. Now in the ſeveral parts of Scripture, which unfold and explain the method of human redemption, I find theſe my preconceptions exactly anſwered. For I

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underſtand, that this promiſed ſeed, the Meſſiah, was manifeſted in the fleſh; to the intent that he might become a ſin offering: "The Lord laid (or cauſed to meet) on him our iniquities;" And "he taſted death for every man." Not only by an act of the Jews, ſuffering the death of a malefactor, and ſo viſibly enduring the curſe of the broken law; but alſo taſting intellectual death, that death which an human ſoul incapable of annihilation, is condemned to ſuffer by ſequeſtration from God its vital principle. This appears by the Redeemer's agony in the garden, and his dolorous complaints on the croſs; when the light of the divine countenance being withdrawn, he endured that horrible ſenſation of the wrath of Omnipotence, to which an unpardoned ſoul is liable through all ages of its exiſtence. Not that we are hence to conceive of an act of vindictive fury in Deity, which could not be ſatisfied without ſome where wreaking revenge: No, this is a baſe idea, and unwarranted by the language of ſcripture; but Chriſt voluntarily ſuffering as our ſurety, and God the father accepting thoſe ſufferings as propitiatory on our behalf, illuſtrated at one and the ſame time, all the moral attributes of God; viz. his Juſtice holineſs, mercy and truth, to the apprehenſion of all created intelligences; who perhaps in their ſeveral orders, then beheld the Creator's

glory ſhining forth with a ſplendour, new even to their exalted capacities: And myriads of the ranſomed children of Adam, will exemplify the glorious attributes of Jehovah, through the countleſs ages of eternity. But further, the moral law which conſtitutes the harmony and bond of the univerſe, was magnified by the Redeemer, who came to fulfill all righteouſneſs, being the brightneſs of the father's glory, and the expreſs image of his holy character; for God gave not the ſpirit unto him by meaſure. And in the laſt place, we have the renovation of the human ſoul to the ſame divine image, as the ultimate ſcope of the Saviour's undertaking. Holineſs is the end, and faith (or a cordial acceptance of Chriſt in his perſon and offices,) the means, by which men are brought to that attainment. For whenever an individual cloſes with the proffered grace, whatever his previous character might have been, he from that moment enters into a new covenant with his Maker; which is ſigned, or atteſted by the blood of Chriſt, as the ſurety or great truſtee; the mediator between God and man: By virtue of this covenant relation, he claims not only remiſſion of ſin; but alſo thoſe communications of divine influences, by which he riſes above the corruptions of human nature; learns to hate and forſake whatever is morally evil; and to perceive and practice that which is morally

morally good. He has the principle of rectitude ingrafted in his heart, which governs and actuates all his purpoſes and conduct; and this he attains by virtue of the holy ſpirit imparted to him, through faith in the appointed Saviour. "*To them gave he power to become the Sons of God, even to them who believe on his name.*" If it be objected, that all who profeſs chriſtianity, do not diſcover this character: I anſwer, that *all* who profeſs chriſtianity, do not really accede to the covenant. They have not accepted of Chriſt, by that act of the will which reſults from a conviction of his value and ſuitableneſs to their caſe; and therefore not being within the terms of the covenant, they neither do or can partake in its privileges. But all who do ſincerely cloſe with the conditions of grace, are virtually made new creatures; they are renewed in the ſpirit of their mind, and have implanted in them thoſe new principles, by which they actually advance from one degree of holineſs to another, till they are fitted for the beatific viſion of the ſovereign Perfection. The body alſo ſhall be raiſed in its original eſſence, or firſt principle of purity and immortality; after which moral evil ſhall exiſt no more, but order and beauty univerſally prevail, and innumerable millions of redeemed men be added to the kingdom of our God.

Theſe are ſome of the ideas to be collected,

ed, from a ſerious liberal ſtudy of the holy ſcriptures; and I have adduced them, not as compriſing an accurate, or compleat view of the ſubject, for who is ſufficient for this? Who is able to comprehend, the height, and depth, and breadth, of the love of God, in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord! But as hints, which may be improved to the demonſtrating of the divine origin of the Bible, by its conſiſtency with the preconceptions of reaſon, and the purpoſes of moral fitneſs. There are alſo many other traits in the ſacred plan of redemption, in which reaſon is compelled to own the marks of a wiſdom, more than human. For inſtance, in its compleat agreement as the means, with the moral cure its end. The firſt manifeſtations of ſin in the human ſpecies, were pride and unbelief. Both theſe, containing the eſſence of man's departure from, and rebellion againſt God, are remarkably counteracted by the method of ſalvation; which brings down every towering imagination, and the haughty rebel who would be as God, ſelf-ſufficient, is made to feel himſelf a worm, a periſhing beggar, pleading grace and not merit: And he who diſdained to truſt the divine varacity, in a good poſſeſſed; muſt ſeek happineſs in everſion, by a ſimple reliance on the divine faithfulneſs. Surely this is a remedy, nicely adapted to our characteriſtic corruptions, and can only be a preſcription of him who looketh

looketh at the heart, and is intimately acquainted with its utmoſt depravity. Would any of the ſons of men, have deviſed a ſcheme ſo humbling in its principles; ſo totally repugnant to our natural propenſities? Did ever a human being exiſt, who in delineating a mode of juſtification, either with reſpect to God, or man, would have placed it in the righteouſneſs of another, rather than in his own? The folly therefore of thoſe, who would aſcribe the Bible to human invention is glaringly conſpicuous in this reſpect. Further, redemption by Chriſt, not only reſtores forfeited happineſs, but conſidering man in his natural properties and capacity, there is reaſon to believe, that the happineſs ſo attained, will greatly exceed that which was the portion of original innocence. Experience ſhews, that happineſs has not its being in the objects of ſenſe, or local circumſtances; but in the ſoul itſelf; that is to ſay, in the intellectual perceptions and moral feelings; which by the goſpel ſcheme are refined and improved, to a degree, which muſt have been unknown to man under any other diſpenſation. Every real chriſtian, knows ſomething of the propriety of this idea, when by the intellectual faculties, or the eye of the mind, he beholds the condemnatory ſentence of divine juſtice annulled; and contemplates the Sovereign of the univerſe, in the character

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of a reconciled father, a friend intent on bleſſing, a God in covenant, engaged to ſave to the utmoſt! From ſuch perceptions, what blissful effects flow into the affections; love and gratitude, have a pathos, which uninfluenced by the apprehenſion of redeeming grace, thoſe ſentiments could not have acquired: Charity, benevolence, and philanthrophy, iſſuing from the ſame ſource abſorb every ſelfiſh idea, and give that zeſt of feeling, that extatic ſenſation, which an unbeliever cannot comprehend, and therefore deems enthuſiaſm: But which, it appears by the conſtitution of human nature, muſt be a rational and ſolid enjoyment! And when the animal properties, ſhall ceaſe to diſturb the nobler powers of our being, when this corruptible, ſhall have put on incorruption, theſe perceptions, and theſe affections, muſt make up a felicity, which Adam in Paradiſe could not have experienced in its full and ſublimeſt degree.

Alſo, ſuch is the harmony of parts and relations, in the ſacred writings, that a clear apprehenſion of ſcriptural doctrines in one point, throws light upon others, By conſidering the important and beneficial conſequences of the Redeemer's miſſion, I am led to an inſight into the ſprings and motives, of the divine conduct in the conſtitution of the moral world. I ſee, the reaſon *why* the Creator formed man fallible; and why he permitted

permitted a diabolical agent to work on that fallibility: The evil I perceive, was partial and temporary; or rather, was ſwallowed up in a univerſal and eternal good. Seeing, that the pains, ſorrows and temptations, incident to our fallen ſtate, are neceſſary ſteps to the conſummation of perfection and glory, death itſelf ceaſes to be an evil, and becomes good; a privilege to the believer! Hence I learn, that redemption by Jeſus Chriſt, was no accidental remedy applied to an unforeſeen contingence. No, the redeemer of men, was in the eye of God when he laid the foundations of the world; this orb was reared, a kingdom forthe Meſſiah; for whom, and in whom all things conſiſt. Time itſelf commenced its courſe for him, and ſhall continue no longer, than till he has accompliſhed the number of his willing ſubjects. Here are then no random ſtrokes, but all is the reſult of a plan, exiſting in the infinite mind of Deity from all eternity: A plan, the grandeur and magnitude of which, prove its original; for what is there in the boldeſt efforts of human genius, that bears any ſimilitude thereto? The beſt and wiſeſt inſtitutions, framed by great and benevolent minds, with a view to improve the condition of humanity, have not been proof againſt political and moral changes; nor have they been capable of

operation,

operation, beyond a certain extent: But the ſcriptures unfold a ſyſtem of human conduct; which is of univerſal and immutable fitneſs. When was the age, where the community, or what the deſcription of men, to which it has been found inapplicable? Empires, have riſen, and become annihilate; local circumſtances have varied; and the mind of man, has undergone many a revolution, from the influence of civil, or moral cauſes; ſtill the energies of this ſyſtem have remained unaffected, through all the viciſſitudes of ſublunary things; and equally apply to the condition of man, in liberty, or ſlavery; in the ſocial, or ſavage ſtate. Under the beams of intellectual refinement, or beneath the gloomy ſhade of ignorance, here is ſtill a conſtitution, which meliorates, beautifies and ennobles, the character of human nature! The duties enjoined, the motives ſuggeſted, and the principles imparted, by the religion which is built on the faith of Chriſt crucified, are not only adapted to the direction and comfort of individuals; but have a direct tendency, to extirpate whatever is inimical to the well being of ſociety; and to draw forth into action, all which is great, generous and amiable, in the ſentiments of a rational ſoul: And conſequently, to produce that moral beauty and order, which is the *deſideratum* of ſpeculative wiſdom, and the prototype of right reaſon.

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In the kingdom of Providence, we behold the frame of nature moving by laws aſſigned at the formation of all things; laws which have required no reviſion, through the lapſe of ſix thouſand years. In the kingdom of grace, we have a ſyſtem framed at the commencement of time, and ſtill preſerving its energetic powers, without the neceſſity of modification, through the ſame revolution of ages. Both diſpenſations have that common character, which demonſtrates a common origin; and it muſt, I think, be wilful blindneſs or deplorable inattention, which does not diſcern that he who gave to matter its immutable laws, and he who preſcribed the doctrines of redemption, is one and the ſame INFINITE ETERNAL MIND!

Upon the whole, I am neceſſitated to obſerve in the ſacred writings, that conſiſtency of deſign, that harmony of relations, that uncircumſcribed utility, and that perfect agreement with the preconceptions of reaſon in all reſpects, as amount to compleat internal evidence of their divine original; and therefore, I cannot refuſe acquieſcence in the mode of ſalvation by the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; without acting contrary to the light of reaſon, and the dictates of natural religion; and proving myſelf a wilful rebel againſt the authority of the univerſal Sovereign.

IS THERE ANY EXTERNAL EVIDENCE, OF THE DIVINE ORIGINAL OF THE BIBLE?

There is the cleareſt external evidence of this which a rational being can deſire: That which I ſhall eſpecially notice, is the viſible atteſtation of a divine authority, which has attended the writers and teachers of ſcriptural doctrines in greater or leſs degree. There are two propoſitions which the human underſtanding aſſents to as axioms requiring no ſpeculative illuſtration; namely, that a power to controul the operations of nature, muſt be eſpecially granted by the author and governor of nature: And ſecondly, that God who is eſſentially true, could not communicate his power in the confirmation of falſhood. The natural and rational inference from hence is, that if a perſon aſſuming the prophetic character, is enabled to prove his divine miſſion by unequivocal ſigns of an authority delegated by the Deity, he is what he pretends to be, a teacher ſent from God. This is an argument which no ſophiſtry can invalidate, though it may perplex; for what truth is there moral or phyſical, which a vain philoſophy has not at ſome time inſulted. But as often as the propoſition ſimply recurs, the mind will ſpontaneouſly decide for herſelf, independent of foreign influence. As a prophet, or divinely inſpired perſon, Moſes ſtands foremoſt in the cannon of the old teſtament, both

both as to order of time, and the importance of his office: He it was, who declaring the degeneracy of man, made known the way of acceptance by a Mediator, or the promiſed ſeed, he laid the platform of a ſpiritual building, by revealing that ſyſtem of religion, which infinite wiſdom appointed to be the religion of the whole human ſpecies; and was commiſſioned to collect a church or people, who ſhould profeſs this religion in the face of the idolatrous world. He acted as the legiſlator of that people, in the eſtabliſhing both their civil and ſacred conſtitutions; and declared that in thoſe things, he officiated by eſpecial command of God. Now this aſſertion was ſupported by a diſplay of miraculous gifts, by an authority over the ordinary courſe of nature, and by viſible diſplays of the divine glory, witneſſing to his character and conduct: It is therefore impoſſible for me in conſiſtency with reaſon, to contemplate ſuch ſupernatural teſtimonies, and not to be convinced that the books of Moſes, were written under an immediate inſpiration of the Almighty, for the purpoſe of making his mind and will known to the children of men. The ſame muſt be admitted reſpecting the other books of ſcripture, the writers of which were ſeverally capable of evincing in ſome way or other, the divine atteſtation to their meſſages and character. But I have particularly

inſtanced in the caſe of Moſes, both becauſe his writings conſtitute the ground work of all the reſt, and alſo becauſe a ſatisfactory view in this point, enables the ſerious inquirer to diſcern the immediate ſcope and connection of all the other ſacred books.

HOW ARE YOU ASSURED AT THIS DISTANCE OF TIME, THAT MOSES ACTUALLY GAVE SUCH PROOFS OF A DIVINE MISSION?

The proofs of this are ſo plain and ſimple, that they cannot I think, be rejected, without violence to the principles of common ſenſe. In contemplating the hiſtory of mankind, we obſerve a mutation of the human character, under the influence of moral or political cauſes, ſo that at any given period of time, the aſpect of ſociety in every country will be found, different from what it was five hundred years before; but contrary to this general experience, I behold a nation, which through a courſe of near four thouſand years, and amidſt the moſt awful concuſſions that ever ſhook a political body, ſtill maintaining an uniformity of character, without the leaſt variation of habit or taſte; this ſingular people is the Jews; diſperſed for ages paſt among all nations of the earth, mingling with ſociety under all its various forms of, barbarous or polite, free or enſlaved, chriſtian or infidel; yet with reſpect to ſentiment and manners, a Jew of the

the preſent day, is exactly what his anceſtor was, at the diſtance of one, two, or more than three thouſand years ago: A ſtability of character under ſuch variation of external circumſtance, and through ſo long a ſeries of ages, is matter of the greateſt aſtoniſhment, and highly intereſting to our curioſity: It is found however on examination, to be owing entirely to a religious peculiarity, and the eſſential principle which produced, feeds and ſupports that peculiarity, is a belief in the divine miſſion of Moſes, founded on the certainty of his miraculous powers. I inquire, at what time ſuch a belief firſt obtained in the Jewiſh nation, and I find the date to be the ſame as that of the national exiſtence, ſeeing there is no period of their hiſtory ſince they became a people, when the ſame belief did not commonly prevail; it muſt therefore have originated with the founders of the civil ſtate, and thoſe it is clear, were cotemporaries of Moſes, and eye witneſſes of his conduct; and they have atteſted the matter of fact in the moſt unequivocal manner poſſible, by the act of ſolemnly committing to their children thoſe books of Moſes, which record the miracles performed by him, in which he tells them "your eyes have ſeen all theſe things which the lord wrought by my hand" and their delivering ſuch declaration as a ſacred invaluable depoſit to poſterity, is virtually the ſign manual

of that cotemporary generation, to the truth and validity of the record: What clearer evidence then can I require of the reality of Moſes's miraculous powers than the teſtimony of a whole nation, conſiſting of ſix hundred thouſand men, with their proportionate number of women and young perſons, who were not only ſpectators of, But actually intereſted in every miracle wrought by him: To heſitate in my belief of the fact is to inſult the human character, and in effect to deny the poſſibility of any moral certainty.

Nevertheleſs as we are not morally obliged to adopt the opinions of any man or ſet of men, farther than by an honeſt and diligent examination, we find them conſonant to our reaſon; it may be proper for our compleat ſatisfaction to conſider, whether thoſe primitive Jews were in all reſpects competent to decide on the facts they have thus atteſted, and to this end let us adduce every poſſible ſuppoſition under which they may have been deceived or impoſed on. Was it likely that popular rumour had any influence in this caſe? A fiction we know may be propagated by a few perſons of ſeeming reſpectability, and ſo become the common belief of a nation. But this could not have happened here, for the Iſraelites at this time were not ſettled in a national domain, admitting of local diſtances and retirements, but collected together in a marching body, or common encampment;

encampment; and therefore Moſes relates either what every body had witneſſed, or what nobody with any ſhew of plauſibility could pretend to have witneſſed. Perhaps ſome may ſay that the people who carried the inſtitutes of Moſes into effect, and ſtrictly ſpeaking gave that bias to the public mind which it ever after retained, were not the firſt, but the ſecond generation of Jews, who perhaps had imbibed a religious veneration for Moſes as the mere prejudice of education, and to whom the belief of his miracles was the impreſſion of an infant tale. True it is that the firſt ſettlers in Canaan, were the ſecond generation, and conſiſted of thoſe who were under twenty years of age at the time when their fathers for rebellion were ſentenced by the Almighty to die in the wilderneſs, but being born before the departure from Egypt, theſe perſons had perſonally witneſſed the ſame miraculous events with their fathers, their feet had actually trod on the bed of the Red Sea, when the waters thereof divided at the motion of Moſes's rod; they had drank of the waters which flowed miraculouſly from the rock, and had eaten of the Manna for the ſpace of forty years, and conſequently were as good judges of the matter of fact on which their ſacred conſtitution was eſtabliſhed, as the former generation to whom the plan of it was originally given. Again, the Jews for their belief in the divine

authority

authority of their lawgiver, have been branded as a credulous ſuperſtitious people by the enemies of revelation, both in ancient and modern time. They were not indeed addicted to metaphyſical ſubtleties, as ſome pagan nations, nor have they been remarkable for any extraordinary attainments in ſcientific learning; but on the other hand, there is no reaſon to ſuppoſe them inferior to the ordinary ſtandard of human intellect, and therefore muſt of neceſſity be allowed as competent to decide a queſtion depending on ſenſible experience, as the moſt enlightened of their unbelieving enemies. Neither doth it appear by any hiſtorical documents that they were remarkable for credulity; on the contrary in the inſtance on which this charge mainly reſts, they manifeſted a very oppoſite character, being both averſe from the authority of Moſes, and diſtruſtful of his divine commiſſion, which temper was ſo predominant in their conduct during the whole of his miniſtry, that it is evident the credit finally given to his prophetic character was rather extorted by the force of truth and ſtubborn fact, than prompted by any prediſpoſing ſentiment. Finally, I cannot reaſonably attribute the peculiar opinions of the Iſraelites concerning the books of Moſes, to ſuperſtition; I conceive that ſuperſtition may be properly defined an undue reſpect for things falſe, or worthleſs in themſelves,

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and is always produced by a defective apprehenſion of its objects. Let the mind be enabled to exerciſe its native energies in the inveſtigation of that which demands its implicit veneration, and ſuperſtition will be annihilated. On this principle which I believe experience will juſtify, the Jews in this inſtance at leaſt, were the fartheſt of all people then living from meriting this ſtigma; the writings to which their profound reverence attached, were not like the ſacred books of the heathens, intruſted only to a prieſthood, and ſhrouded from the vulgar eye by a veil of myſterious obſcurity. No, the books of Moſes were at their immediate promulgation, thrown into common uſe, the people were not only permitted, but commanded to acquaint themſelves with their contents, and alſo diligently to impart them to their children; neither were they a poſthumous work publiſhed after the author and his cotemporaries were deceaſed, but the people to whom they were delivered were the ſame perſons who had borne an intereſting part in all the tranſactions recorded, and therefore their opinions reſpecting them, ſo far from having the leaſt tincture of ſuperſtition, were the reſult of ſolid reaſon operating in a purer and more unbiaſed mode than can be inſtanced in any ſimilar occaſion, new teſtament ſubjects only excepted. Further, was there a poſſibility that the miracles

aſcribed

aſcribed to Moſes might be an illuſion of the ſenſes. There is no doubt but that the arts of magic did prevail in the heathen world, in which Satan was virtually worſhiped in idolatrous rites, and perſons holding communion with the ſpirits of darkneſs, were ſometimes capable of impoſing on the external ſenſes of ſpectators, by magical deluſions: But in this point no people better qualified to judge than the Iſraelites of that age, who had reſided in a country where thoſe ſatanical arts were practiſed, and by their innate reluctance to the emancipation propoſed by Moſes, would be particularly ſuſpicious and accurate in the examination of his miracles, ſome of which by divine permiſſion, in order to excite the niceſt inquiry on the part of Iſrael were ſucessfully counterfeited by the magicians of Egypt, by which the divine ſource of Moſes's ſupernatural powers would be inconteſtibly proved. But ſhould they have failed in deciſion here, they muſt afterwards have been compelled to aſcertain the diſtinction, between the real operations of divine power, and the ſhadowy deceptions of magic. Was the corporeal ſuſtenance of ſo vaſt a multitude, during forty years by miraculous ſupply, an illuſion of the ſenſes? Or was ſuch the deſtruction of Corah in atteſtation of Moſes's miniſtry? Or the plague, ſlaying its thouſands, for their unbelieving contempt of his office, as the delegate of Heaven to con-

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duct them to the promiſed land? In fine, the poſſibility of magical operation, is totally refuted, by a conſideration of the end of Moſes's miſſion; its expreſs deſign, being to eſtabliſh a religion, which ſhould abſolutely prohibit and cut off that communion with evil ſpirits, on which the being of magic depended. So that, to ſuppoſe Satan by his emiſſaries, the magicians, witches, or diviners, had any thing to do in the caſe, is to ſuppoſe him actively employed in deſtroying his own kingdom. There remains I think, but one ſuppoſition more, which can tend to invalidate the teſtimony of the primitive Jews to the divine authority of Moſes; namely, a ſuſpicion that the whole was an artful pretence, to cover an ambitious deſign. Such an idea as this, carries indeed its own contradiction with it; for is it at all probable, that Moſes who had been bred in the Egyptian court, was ſo ignorant of the manners and ſpirit, of the nations with whom he was to deal, as to expect they would yield their territories, at a requiſition made in the name of a Deity, whoſe authority they had not been taught to acknowledge. Latter ages, afford inſtances of rebellions ſtirred up, and crowns diſpoſed of, by a power pretending to act as God's vicegerent; but in all ſuch inſtances, there was a prediſpoſing circumſtance, neceſſary to the ſucceſs of the meaſure: The people, were previouſly accuſtomed

cuſtomed to own and to ſubmit to this pretended power. Moſes, had no ſuch favourable footing to proceed on; and cannot be ſuppoſed to have deſired a plea, which he muſt have known would be treated with contempt. It appears from his own memoir, that he was fully aware of the apparent inexpediency of it, and expected nearly ſuch an anſwer, as Pharaoh actually gave: "Who is Jehovah, I know not Jehovah". However indulge if you pleaſe this ſuppoſition, in ſpite of its obvious abſurdity; and try the iſſue by the rules of common ſenſe. Is it likely, the farce would have been continued, after the end was anſwered? Suppoſe the people to have carried their point, by pleading the divine authority of their leader; was it neceſſary, they ſhould afterwards impoſe on themſelves, and poſterity, the Levitical yoke of inſtitutes and ceremonies; burdenſome to themſelves, and ridiculous to their neighbours; to perpetuate, a conſtitution which ſecluded them from commerce with the reſt of the world; and reſtricted their political aggrandiſement, by forbidding foreign alliances, and the eſtabliſhment of a military force, in the manner of the ſurrounding nations? Or was it neceſſary, to hand down to poſterity, a book which recorded their own perverſeneſs, ingratitude and apoſtacy; and which repreſented their national character, in an unamiable and diſgraceful light?

Surely,

Surely, carnal policy would have invented ſomething more pleaſant, than the Levitical code; more honourable to themſelves, than Moſes' record. In fine, to the eye of plain ſenſe and reaſon, there appears no flaw in the evidence of this people; and ſeeing that divine providence, has ſo ordered the courſe of moral events, that this evidence is brought down to us by a clear unequivocal channel, I have an aſſurance, equal to ocular demonſtration, that Moſes really wrought thoſe ſtupendous miracles, which prove a ſpecial commiſſion, from the great Soverign of the Univerſe.

Now, the teſtimony which an unprejudiced mind, will draw from ſuch reflections as the foregoing, to the truth and reality of Moſes' miracles, is all that is requiſite to the fixing our opinions, concerning the divine inſpiration of his writings. For theſe, being of no ſpeculative, or ſecondary nature, but eſſential to the religion he eſtabliſhed; are to be conſidered, as conſtituting the principal end of the prophetic department; and conſequently their divine authority is that which miracles mainly atteſt. Nevertheleſs, although right reaſon, will ſimply own her obligation to receive that as the word of God, which comes authenticated by the power of God; I perceive, that the opinions of the ancient Iſraelites, concerning thoſe ſcriptures, had more in them than this implicit faith. I ſpeak not here, of ſuch as relate to

Jewiſh national affairs, the ſubject matter of which was to be appreciated by ſenſible experience; but of thoſe, which treat of events prior to that age, as the book of Geneſis, comprizing a hiſtory of man, from the commencement of time. And with reſpect to this hiſtory, I obſerve, that although the people to whom it was delivered, had ſubſtantial grounds of belief, that the faculties of the writer, were ſupernaturally aſſiſted in the compilation of ſo extraordinary a work; yet they were in poſſeſſion of a teſt, by which they could aſcertain its merits, on the ſcore of moral truth. This teſt, was *tradition.* Or the memory of ancient facts, orally tranſmitted, from one generation to another. As the origin of the univerſe—the original innocence and happineſs of man—the way of acceptance, by expiatory ſacrifice—the deluge—the renovation of all things, by a divine perſon—and other doctrines of ſcripture. Traces of which, are to be found in the ancient ſyſtems of pagan mythology; and it might reaſonably be thought, that at the age of Moſes, the traditional knowledge of thoſe ſubjects, was not ſo obſcured by fable, but that the grand outlines of the Moſaic hiſtory, might every where have been found, according with the received notions of all mankind. But whatever degree of perſpicuity, attached at this time to general tradition; it is certain that the Iſraelites,

ites, were familiar with the ſubjects of this early hiſtory: Divine providence, having ſo ordered the courſe of events, that this family, had been the *conſtituted guardians*, of ſacred tradition; as they have ſince been, of the written hiſtory. But to ſet this idea, in a clearer light; let us take a view of the channel, by which this knowledge muſt have flowed, pure and uncorrupt to the cotemporaries of Moſes; from Adam the firſt man: Who, we are to conſider as iſſuing from the hand of his Creator, in the full poſſeſſion of intellectual vigour; no cloud of ignorance, obſcuring the luſtre of his rational perceptions; no error, or imbecility, obſtructing the expanſion of his moral ideas. To this bright intelligence, was the great ſubſtantial, of revealed religion; the promiſe of a Redeemer; made known by the Almighty. God himſelf was the tutor; and Adam, the immediate pupil of celeſtial wiſdom, was every way qualified, both to apprehend, and to tranſmit to poſterity, the cleareſt ideas of the being, and perfections of Deity; and his revealed will concerning the mode of human acceptance. All the patriarchs, mentioned in the old teſtament before the flood, were born in the life time of this illuſtrious head, and teacher of the human race. But, I will inſtance only in Methuſelah; whoſe remarkable longevity, enabled him to be the preceptor of Noah.

Thus, at the diſtance of ſixteen hundred years, there was a family, which had received the experience of Adam, only at one remove from his own perſonal diſcourſe. For Methuſelah, who probably had himſelf been inſtructed immediately from the mouth of the firſt man, was living a ſhort time before the flood: Therefore, Noah and his ſons, who were appointed to repeople the world; poſſeſſed a fund of true knowledge, ſufficient for the direction of mankind, in the doctrines of revealed religion; or the right apprehenſion of God, and themſelves. But as this knowledge, could then be only perpetuated by oral tradition; it ſoon became obſcured by the fables of imagination; and at length totally loſt, to all the purpoſes of rational and ſpiritual devotion. In *one* branch of Noah's family, it was preſerved, and about four hundred years after the deluge, we find Abraham of the line of Shem, appearing the progenitor of the Jewiſh nation. Now here it is important to acquire, how much of the tradition we are tracing, might have been underſtood by this eminent perſon; and by what means it was acquired. And we find that he might be put in poſſeſſion of this ſacred treaſure, by Shem; who lived till after the Abrahamic covenant was eſtabliſhed. So that, although Abraham, in point of time, lived at the diſtance of two thouſand years from Adam; yet in the order

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of communication, he was but the third from him. For Abraham we ſee, might receive the tradition, from Shem; who had heard it from Methuſelah; and Methuſelah from Adam. So that in point of authenticity, and exactneſs, it fell nothing ſhort of a written memorial, at the time of its tranſmiſſion, to the Hebrew family; which henceforth, became its peculiar guardians. For the promiſe given in general terms to Adam, that a Redeemer ſhould ariſe from among his poſterity; was now renewed to Abraham by a covenant, fixing the Meſſiah's deſcent, to his direct iſſue. Which privelege imparted to his deſcendants a perſonal intereſt in the preſervation of ancient tradition, as connected with the true knowledge of God and his purpoſes concerning man. Therefore I cannot ſuppoſe that at the liberation of this family, little more than two hundred years after the death of Jacob, there was a ſingle individual of it, numerous as that race was now become, who had not a clear comprehenſion of all things from the begining of time, and who would not fail to compare the Moſaic hiſtory with the received opinions and belief of preceeding generations, and thus ground a reception of the writing, on a moral certainty of its accuracy and truth. I conclude then, on what appears to me the dictates of common ſenſe; that the ſyſtem of revealed religion has always obtained in the

world; and that with reſpect to the book of Geneſis, Moſes was not conſidered by his cotemporaries as an author, but merely a compiler, collecting and committing to writing, that knowledge of ancient facts which hitherto had been preſerved by memory, and floated down the ſtream of time in the medium of oral tradition. At the ſame time they had ſenſible demonſtration that he acted under the immediate inſpiration of the God of truth, and conſequently was guided in this undertaking by that divine influence which would infallibly ſecure him from error or impoſition, in the diſcharge of this important work. And for my own part, when I reflect on the condition of mankind where this written truth hath not extended, I cannot but confeſs the warmeſt gratitude to the Almighty, that by the ſpecial inſpiration of Moſes he has graciouſly ſecured ſuch a fund of ſacred knowledge for our uſe, which otherwiſe we know by experience would have been totally hidden from the children of men; and a world of intellectual beings had lain in mental darkneſs, ignorant of God and the mode of his acceptable worſhip; ignorant of themſelves; their origin, work and final deſignation.

Reviewing the ſeveral books of Scripture in connection with thoſe of Moſes, I ſee not a collection of detached writings or deſultory matter, but a compendium of doctrines

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eſtabliſhed on unity of principle, and terminating in coincidence of views and deſign: For the ſacred books though written at very diſtant intervals of time, by men of different talents, education and rank in ſociety, have the ſame relation to each other as the component parts of a large and beautiful building. As literary compoſitions they have their diſtinct characters of hiſtorical, didactic, miſcellaneous or prophetic; yet viewed as a whole, they preſent one harmonious ſyſtem, one truth ſupported and revealed by a variety of conſtituent parts; which remarkable agreement proves the ſeveral writers, to have been influenced by the ſame indiviſible Being, (in whoſe infinite mind the plan itſelf originated,) ſo far as was neceſſary to their recording or declaring whatever was eſſential to the illuſtrating his divine adminiſtration, and enlarging the conceptions of mankind, with regard to ſpiritual objects. At the ſame time the writer was left to expreſs his ideas according to the natural bent of his genius, educational attainments, or habits of life; and hence we may diſcern under a variety of ſtyle and diction, one common view of the divine character; of human depravity; and of redemption by a promiſed Saviour. But chiefly and finally; I apprehend the divine inſpiration of ſcripture is proved by prophecy; there are ſcattered throughout the ſacred books, occaſional predictions

dictions of future events, relative to the Jews, or the neighbouring nations; the ſpeedy accompliſhment of which ſometimes atteſted the ſpecial inſpiration of the ſpeaker or writer in his own life time; at othe times the predictions were fulfilled at a later period. However the Jews had from age to age, ſatisfactory proofs of the divine miſſion of their prophets; but that which to us forms evidence irreſiſtible, is the general maſs of ſcripture prophecy, the united ſcope of which relates to the commencement, progreſs and final ſucceſs of that mediatorial kingdom, which God had determined to ſet up in the world, in the perſon of the Meſſiah. And though in the grandeur of thoſe views, the prophets ſometimes pauſe as it were, to denounce the doom of then exiſting nations or individuals, they ſeem impatient to return to their main object, and exert if I may ſo ſpeak, all the divine afflatus, in anticipating the glory of latter ages, when by the decree of Deity the Redeemer ſhall eſtabliſh his kingdom over every part of the habitable Globe. In purſuance of these ſublime ideas the prophecies muſt neceſſarily take in a prodigious tract of time, and involve the fate of many kingdoms and people; and ſuch is in fact the case, from the time of Moſes to the cloſing of the ſcripture canon, we have a predicted ſeries of events running through all intervening ages to the preſent time, and

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ſtretching beyond us to the conſummation of all things. Several eminent expoſitors have laudably employed their talents and learning, in illuſtrating the exact fulfilling of thoſe prophecies, as they relate to different nations and periods of time; and thus a ſtanding evidence of the divine origin of ſcripture has been provided for the conviction of all ſucceſſive ages. But we live at a criſis when all the prophetic lines appear to draw nearer each other, as if about to unite in ſome effulgent point; in contemplating the great and awful events which are taking place in the nations around us, I ſee at this day, the ſtriking accompliſhment of prophecies delivered two thouſand, or four thouſand years ago; and the arcanum of providence is ſo far diſcloſed, that we diſcern others moſt important and glorious in their nature ready to be fulfilled at no very diſtant period. Now it is impoſſible for a thinking mind not to be ſatisfied of the divine inſpiration of the ſacred writngs. For though the human underſtanding is capable by moral experience, of looking a little way into the courſe of events, and can in ſome meaſure form a probable eſtimate of the conſequences of human action; yet how limited is ſuch penetration, and how often is that little foreſight baffled by unforeſeen contingencies. Who then could reveal the rise and fall of empires; the revolutions of ſtates and the characters of nations

tions, through ſo vaſt a ſucceſſion of ages, but He, who had the comprehenſive plan exiſting in his eternal mind, and is of power ſufficient to accompliſh every purpoſe of his will, and every aim of his univerſal government.

IS THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF IMPORTANCE TO US?

Conſidered merely as a civil record it will not appear ſo, but viewed in connection with the grand ſcope of the Bible it will be found of the greateſt importance to all deſcriptions of mankind. It having been the will of God from the beginning that men ſhould worſhip him in and through the Mediator he had appointed, it was conſiſtent with his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs to make proviſion in his moral government of the world, for the perpetuation of the religion which himſelf had revealed to Adam. There was then a beautiful propriety in the ſelection of one family for this benevolent purpoſe, at a time when the knowledge of ſacred truth began to be every where obſcured. The calling of Abraham took place when the deſcendants of Noah had multiplied into nations, and the foundations of mighty empires were laid; and here the ſacred penman turns from general hiſtory to the particular affairs of this one choſen family, which being conſtituted the truſtees of the divine promiſes, were of more real conſequence than all other beings

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on the face of the earth yet made no conſpicuous figure till the *Exodus*, or departure from Egypt; when idolatry had taken a general ſpread, and the human mind had loſt every rational perception of divine things. At this period of increaſing ignorance and error, I behold the Iſraelites emancipated from ſlavery, and raiſed to political conſequence, not by the partial regard of heaven towards them; for as men, all the families of the earth muſt equally participate the favor of the univerſal parent; but to the end that by their moral experience, the world might be inſtructed in the principles of divine truth. Therefore regarding them as inſtruments choſen and employed by the Almighty, in ſubordination to his purpoſe of bringing all men to the knowledge and obedience of his revealed will; every thing relative to this people, is of general ſignificancy and importance to all deſcriptions of mankind. I apprehend that the jewiſh polity, was a conſtituted teſtimony to the truth and will of God, in two eſpecial inſtances: Firſt, as the religious ſyſtem, exemplified the ſubſtantials of revealed religion, or the mode of a ſinners' acceptance with the Deity; and upon attentive examination, the levitical inſtitution will be found to ſhadow forth the fundamental doctrines of the goſpel, from the yearly entrance of the High Prieſt within the vail, to the moſt trivial circumſtance

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(if in this view any thing can be called trivial,) of the ceremonial law. The world was emphatically taught the eſſentials of chriſtianity, through all ages of the jewiſh national exiſtence; and chriſtians now, and to the lateſt period of time, will from thoſe records aſcertain their religion, to be coeval with the being of man. But further, the hiſtory of Iſrael, is of importance to us, inaſmuch as it elucidates the doctrine of a ſuperintending providence, ruling and directing the affairs of mankind. Under that extraordinary mode of government ſtiled a Theocracy, the Almighty manifeſted himſelf as preſident or head of the ſtate; by ſenſible tokens of his immediate preſence, and by the peculiar adminiſtration of public affairs, thoſe purpoſes of his moral government were explicitly underſtood, which in the ordinary courſe of things, can be known only by their effect. Now when we conſider, how much of true religion conſiſts in a due apprehenſion of God, as the ſupreme arbiter of events, it will appear that the jewiſh Theocracy, was not the reſult of partiality towards a particular people; but rather a ſpeaking picture of truths, which all rational creatures are concerned to underſtand. Thus, when the Lord aſſures the people that he would deliver ſuch an army into their hands, or eſtabliſh ſuch a family on the throne, the then exiſting nations were led

to recognize the ſupremacy of the eternal Godhead; and all ſucceeding generations, are inſtructed to trace ſecond cauſes to their immediate origin. It is not indeed material to us what king ſat on the throne of Iſrael, or Judah, at ſuch a period, or what was the preciſe meaſure of their civil advantages; but it is of the utmoſt importance, that we have ſuitable ideas of the being, truth, power and holineſs of our Creator; and for theſe, we are more indebted to the Jewiſh hiſtory, than ſuperficial readers are willing to ſuppoſe. Nor could we have been deprived of thoſe records, without detriment to the cauſe of truth and ſound knowledge: I might ſay, without being ſenſible of a chaſm in the chain of moral events; for certain it is, that from this hiſtory, we acquire more conſiſtent apprehenſions of the divine conduct, in the conſtitution of human affairs, than from all the volumes of ſpeculative philoſophy which the vanity of carnal reaſoning has obtruded on the world.

ARE THERE NO APPARENT INCONSISTENCIES IN THIS HISTORY?

Such will probably be imagined, by a perſon who reads the ſacred hiſtory without due attention to its ſcope and connection; juſt as the peruſal of any other literary compoſition, will preſent imperfect ideas to a reader, who does not apprehend the ſpirit

and meaning of the writer. But a proper regard to the grand deſign of ſcripture, will render the whole intelligible, and conſiſtent. However, I beg you will ſpecify, what has been thought objectionable; ſince the ſubject cannot ſuffer by candid examination.

WAS THE EMANCIPATION OF ISRAEL FROM EGYPTIAN BONDAGE, ATTENDED WITH NO CIRCUMSTANCES, INCONSISTENT WITH OUR NATURAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE JUSTICE AND GOODNESS OF GOD?

The holy ſcriptures, have often ſuffered by the contracted views of ſuperficial readers; who can ſee nothing but a partial regard to one nation, in contempt of all the world beſides; and becauſe we have our perſonal prejudices and attachments, are apt to think the Deity can be ſuſceptible of ſimilar influences. But ſuch illiberal concluſions, are not conſonant to right reaſon; nor are they warranted by the ſcriptures themſelves, which expreſſly diſcountenance every idea of the kind, (*Deuteronomy* chap. 7. verſes 7. 8. 9.) and declare that the people were choſen for their father's ſake, becauſe the Lord would illuſtrate his faithfulneſs and truth, in keeping covenant and mercy to a thouſand generations; that is, for ever. And therefore the deſolations of Egypt, ought not to be conſidered as the effect of vindictive reſentment in behalf of the Iſraelites; but as neceſſary and ſeaſonable diſplays of omnipotence, adapted to draw the

the attention of mankind from local and imaginary divinities, to an apprehenſion of the one, ſupreme, ſelf-exiſtent, Deity: Who by one comprehenſive view, beholding the chain of events, had ſo arranged his purpoſes, that the period appointed for the eſtabliſhment of his Church, or true religion, was alſo that of Pharaoh's exiſtence. A man whoſe natural inflexibility of temper, would give occaſion for ſuch manifeſtations of divine power, as ſhould edify the human race at large. Which is implied in the expreſſion, "for this purpoſe have I raiſed thee up, that I might ſhew my power in thee." Or with humble reverence, paraphraſing the ſacred language, "*for this purpoſe have I permitted thee to be at this juncture, not that I might contend with my creature, whom my power could inſtantaneouſly annihilate; but that I might be more clearly known to my rational creation, by the oppoſition which thou blindly and impiouſly makeſt to my will.*" In the ſame manner, is to be conſtrued that declaration, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." Which we muſt rationally underſtand to mean, not any poſitive influence, on the mind of that prince; but a determination to purſue that mode of conduct, which in its natural conſequences, would further excite and confirm his obſtinacy. So by a common figure of ſpeech, the Potter is ſaid to harden his clay, when he places it in a ſituation whereby the action of fire produces that effect. And it

is certain, that at this day, the wickedneſs of man's heart, is drawn into action by external circumſtances; yet the Lord is not unrighteous, in permitting thoſe events to take place, which he knows will have this tendency: Seeing that the overt act of ſin, is no more than a demonſtration of its inherent exiſtence; and to an eye which ſees enmity in the heart, the man is not leſs a rebel becauſe he wants opportunity of acting his rebellion: But the actual diſplay of the principle, juſtifies the dealings of God. Far be it from me, to offer theſe ſuggeſtions as a complete theory of the divine conduct, on this or any other inſtance which we may be led to conſider; as though the creature of a day, were competent to ſcan the operations of an infinite mind. "Shall not the judge of all "the earth do right?" is a reply, ſufficient to ſatisfy our ſpeculations on ſubjects of this nature. And no more is here attempted, than to ſhew that by a ſober exerciſe of our reaſoning faculty, ſo much of ſovereign wiſdom may be apprehended in all the diſpenſations recorded in ſcripture, as muſt convince us that the ways of the Lord are equity and truth. The conduct of Pharaoh, on this occaſion, was in all reſpects unjuſtifiable. His reſiſtance of the demands of Moſes in behalf of Iſrael, was repugnant to the light of reaſon; which could compel even his Magicians to acknowledge the power of the

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ſupreme God. And however at the firſt he might have ſuppoſed the God of the Hebrews, to be no more than a local Deity, whom he was not concerned to obey; the proofs of his eternal power and Godhead, were at length ſo manifeſt, and applied ſo unequivocally to the perceptions of a rational creature, that the oppoſition muſt have been wilful, and the reſult of a mind determined to purſue a ſelfiſh, ambitious policy at all events.

Again, the detention of the Hebrews in oppreſſive bondage, was contrary to natural juſtice, however it might have conſiſted with maxims of ſtate. They were not properly the ſubjects of Pharaoh; but had been invited into Egypt, by a former king, as to an aſylum. And they had repaid the kindneſs of their patrons, by a ſeries of obedient ſervices, and patient induſtry, tending to benefit and enrich the community. Till the politics of the Egyptian court, ſuggeſted a ſcheme of oppreſſion as intolerable, as it was wicked and unjuſt; and whatever political intereſts might dictate to him on this occaſion, he was certainly bound by the principle of equity, to grant them the liberty of quiting his kingdom; which was all they required. The particular interference of Jehovah, was therefore worthy of him, as the univerſal Sovereign; and the deſolations which this obſtinate prince brought on his

kingdom, were imputable to his tyranny and ambition; which rendered him the bane and ſcourge of his people: As we too often ſee millions diſtreſſed, by the pride and obſtinacy of a ſuperior individual. The Hebrews were commanded by the Lord, to aſk of the Egyptians at their departure, ſuch things as they needed. And here it may be obſerved, that the Lord being abſolute proprietor of the world, and all things therein, has an unqueſtionable right to make ſuch transfers thereof, as is good in his ſight. But it appears to me, that the tenor of the hiſtory, does not warrant our ſuppoſing the Gold, or Jewels now obtained by the Iſraelites, to have been a loan. The grant of the land of Canaan to them, could have been no ſecret; and the Egyptians no doubt underſtood, that their deſire of leaving Egypt, was with the immediate view of marching to the promiſed inheritance. Therefore what they ſupplied them with, muſt have been tendered as a gift; and certainly not with the expectation of its being returned; which was what they had not the leaſt ground to look for. For the language of Pharaoh after the departure of Iſrael, clearly ſhews that he conſidered them as having no intention to return. "Wherefore (ſays he) have we "let the people go from ſerving us?" Therefore I conceive, that whatever ideas our tranſlation may give of the text, the general

general ſcope of language of the hiſtory, cannot in conſiſtency with common ſenſe, allow us to think that the things mentioned, were either aſked, or beſtowed, as a loan. Though if it had, the Lord whoſe are all things, might righteouſly have appointed ſuch contribution, as a juſt and equitable retribution for the long unrewarded ſervices, which Iſrael had rendered to the Egyptians.

IS IT REASONABLE, TO THINK THAT THE ALMIGHTY WOULD COMMAND, THE INDISCRIMINATE SLAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITES?

It is reaſonable to think ſo; provided there appears any thing in the command, of a tendency to benefit the human ſpecies in general. Becauſe no diſpenſation of Providence can be on a partial ſcale; but muſt have reſpect to his univerſal kingdom. At leaſt, whatever is of partial operation, muſt be of univerſal end, and intent. For this, our ideas of an *infinite* neceſſarily imply. A recent writer has attempted to ſhew, that the original text does not command the ſlaughter of thoſe nations; but merely a diſpoſſeſſing them of their territories. However, taking the ſenſe of our common tranſlation, and ſuppoſing that the Almighty did immediately require, their utter deſtruction, I can ſee nothing therein unworthy of God. All but Atheiſts, allow the

the world to be governed by divine agency; and if ſo, Earthquakes Peſtilences, and Famine, which reſpectively deſtroy their thouſands, of all ages and characters, are as much the effect of the Lords purpoſe, as though his commanding voice were diſtinctly heard. We preſume not to queſtion his juſtice in thoſe caſes, yet it is certain that we cannot ſee it any more, than in the inſtance before us; except as we are inſtructed by his revealed word. Here we learn that ſin is the procuring cauſe of thoſe awful judgments, and the teſtimony of all hiſtory fully corroborates it, by ſhewing that there are periods when the iniquity of nations is full. That is, when by an influx of wealth, long proſperity, or other adventitious circumſtances, the public mind is generally corrupted, and a ſpirit of profligacy, vice and impiety, marks the national character. Whenever this happens, partial chaſtiſements are eſſential to the good of the whole; and whether we apprehend it or not, it is the abounding of iniquity which renders the diminution of a people neceſſary to the intereſts of the moral world, and occaſions ſecond cauſes to receive their devaſtating commiſſion from the ſupreme Arbiter of events. When Canaan was given by promiſe to Abraham, the Lord pronounced that the iniquity of thoſe nations was not yet full. By the natural tendency of human depravi-

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ty 430 years would do much in effecting their meaſure; and judging by thoſe ſpecial inſtances of ſuperſtition and crime, in which Iſrael was forbidden to imitate them; the Idolatry of thoſe nations ſeems to have been of peculiar malignancy, and their character to have degenerated beyond the common exceſs of human depravity. We cannot then diſpute, either the prerogative, or the juſtice of God in their extermination. But ſome have affected to doubt, whether the Lord would expreſſly authorize men to be the executioners of his juſtice. I apprehend this queſtion will be ſatisfactorily ſolved, by adverting to the criſis when this command was given, and to the ends intended thereby: For as nothing vain or frivolous can attach to the divine conduct, there muſt have been important reaſons for ſuch deviation from the ordinary courſe of the Almighty's moral government. Now I obſerve, that the time when this command was given, was the commencement of a new era in the hiſtory of man. Hitherto the knowledge of God and his will reſted on the oral teſtimony of the primeval ages; which teſtimony by reaſon of the depravity of our ſpecies, had been generally rejected or perverted to purpoſes of ſuperſtition, ſo that atheiſm or idolatry every where prevailed; but the period was now come, when infinite goodneſs would no longer leave his rational creation, to wander

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in the endleſs mazes of ſpeculative opinion, and the chimeras of a vain imagination: He would be known to mankind as the eternal cauſe and ſupreme governor of all things; and he was now about to erect a monument, whereon in legible characters, might be engraven, his poſitive will in all points relative to the ſacred and ſocial duties of men. This monument was, the nation of Iſrael, now to be placed in a conſpicuous ſtation; to the end that in them, their laws, and worſhip, the race of Adam might read the original charter of redemption, emblematically ſet forth, and learn the way of acceptance, viz. the ſpiritual worſhip of one God, in and through a mediator, expreſſly delineated in poſitive precepts and lively figures. The occaſion then, was manifeſtly of that importance, which might juſtify ſome extraordinary diſplay of the divine majeſty. The awful deſtruction of incorrigible ſinners, was ſuited to ſtrike the attention of mankind; but had it been attended with no uncommon circumſtance, the moral benefit would have been comparatively little; for we know that in this our day of ſuperior light, the moſt awful cataſtrophe is often reſolved into common or natural accident; but the bloody extermination of a people by an expreſs command, abſolutely impoſed on another people, formed that demonſtration of the authority and agency of God in human

man affairs, which could not be miſtaken or evaded; and would eſtabliſh that great preliminary truth, neceſſary to be underſtood in order to the new conſtitution of things. At the ſame time, it is impoſſible to conceive of any thing more conducive to the purity and edification of the Church, now about to be conſtituted than this commiſſion, which would indelibly impreſs a conviction of the power, holineſs and juſtice of Jehovah, on the minds of his profeſſed worſhippers. And with reſpect to the world at large, though a general ſuppreſſion of idolatry did not ſucceed, there can be no doubt but that by this diſpenſation, ſuch apprehenſions of the divine character were extenſively diſſeminated as produced a happy effect on the ſtate of ſociety, and tended to repreſs the tide of human ignorance and ſuperſtition in ſome conſiderable meaſure, till the full diſcloſure of the goſpel day, of which the period we are conſidering was ſubſtantially the dawn.

Thus while I conceive the command here given to Iſrael, was commenſurate with his gracious deſigns of recovering our fallen race to holineſs and felicity, I ſee not on what ground it can be thought a ſanction of cruelty and ſanguinary habits: A juſt and merciful prince may commiſſion a ſubject to inflict a ſentence of law on another ſubject; in this caſe the executioner acting only as

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the ſervant of the ſtate, is not a murderer, and it would be abſurd to ſay that ſuch commiſſion is the ſanction of crime. On the ſame principle the nation of Iſrael might have been ſelected from the maſs of mankind to a ſpecial office under the authority of the univerſal law-giver, without in the leaſt diſcharging them from their ſocial obligations, or rendering them leſs amenable to the laws of human ſociety than their fellow men. And in ſhort, this people conſidered in their common capacity as a ſocial community, not in the ſpecial and temporary character they were now made to ſuſtain, were not only ſubjected to the moral law in common with all rational beings, but their civil conſtitution was replete with ſuch principles of tenderneſs and humanity, as are not found in the code of any other nation. Some from this inſtance affect to deduce an argument for the lawfulneſs of war: But with equal plauſibility it might be urged, that becauſe a few individuals in a ſtate are occaſionally commiſſioned by the civil power, to execute puniſhment on offenders againſt the law, therefore all have an indiſcriminate power over the lives of their fellow ſubjects. The creator as the author of human life, might effect its ſuſpenſion, by any inſtrument he chuſes; but except he delegate his authority to that end, we have no ſuch right. "Thou "ſhalt do no murder" is the law of our being;

being; it was in force before the tranſaction we are ſpeaking of, even from the beginning, and will be ſo as long as human ſociety ſhall exiſt. God may take away life, he does take it away by innumerable methods; he may command it to be taken away, as a ſacrifice to his juſtice; yet this is not a diſpenſing with his poſitive law as it reſpects our conduct. Therefore except we can produce a commiſſion immediately from himſelf, a commiſſion like this of Iſrael, inconteſtibly proved by ſupernatural evidence, it ſeems demonſtrable that we cannot juſtify the practice of war on any pretext. Without doubt, this evil, though not warranted by God, is permitted in the courſe of his providential adminiſtration: But it is permitted only as a natural effect of a deteſted and accurſed cauſe, viz ſin; for of this proceeds war: from avarice, ſenſuality, the luſt of dominion, and the luſt of revenge, thoſe evil paſſions of our nature, which God abhors, which he every where condemns in his word, and which the renovating grace of the goſpel is intended to ſubdue. With what ſhew of reaſon or propriety, can he be ſuppoſed to approve the effect, when he expreſſly condemns the principle. But till the bleſſed remedy which he has provided for the moral cure, ſhall univerſally operate to the deſtruction of this principle, he reſerves the conſequence in his own immediate

direction; and by a wiſdom far above our comprehenſion, makes the effect, corrective of the cauſe. But as we cannot from an act of divine prerogative, draw any precedent for our conduct; ſo neither can we infer that God approves war, without allowing that he approves ſin, or our common degeneracy from moral rectitude.

WAS NOT THE MORAL CHARACTER OF SAUL, BETTER THAN THAT OF DAVID; HOW THEN, IS THE CHOICE OF THE LATTER, AND THE REJECTION OF THE FORMER, CONSISTENT WITH JUSTICE?

This inſtance of ſcripture, has afforded a favourite topic of declamation to the enemies of revelation: But I apprehend that thoſe objections are founded in ignorance, and a total miſconception of the ſubject. In conſidering, the rejection of Saul as a king, we muſt call to mind the nature of the jewiſh conſtitution. Its principles, did not recognize the regal authority; however when a deſire to be like the nations around, induced the people to demand a king, the Lord appointed them one; but would not allow of any radical alteration in the conſtitution, which was ſtill to continue under that ſingular form a Theocracy. And the perſon, who ſhould ſuſtain the office of king, was to be the immediate vicegerent of Jehovah, and the guardian of the eſtabliſhed religion; which we have already conſidered as an emblematical figure of the goſpel, and therefore neceſſary

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to be perpetuated, till the thing ſignified ſhould take place. Moreover the ſpecial priveleges of the Jews, and their exiſtence as a nation, depended on their adherence to their ſacred conſtitution; that man then who ſhould lightly reſpect it, was an enemy to the common wealth, and the political intereſts of his country.

But this did Saul. Take a view of his conduct, and you will diſcover a contempt of this ſacred conſtitution, as that which might be rendered ſubſervient to his caprice or convenience: His procedure at Gilgal at the beginning of his reign, manifeſted a ſpirit of inovation; as afterwards his ſlaughter of the prieſts, demonſtrated an inveterate hatred of their religion and office. If then the engliſh people, thought themſelves juſtified in expelling James the ſecond, as inimical to their conſtitution; how can we queſtion the juſtice of Sauls rejection, when not only the intereſt of a particular ſtate was concerned, but of the human ſpecies, according to the plan eſtabliſhed in the infinite wiſdom of God. Who alſo declared, that he had found David a man after his own heart; and the connection in which thoſe words are found, warrants us to conclude that they imply no more, than that David was cordially attached to, and would diligently ſupport the inſtituted religion; and therefore may be ſuppoſed to refer to

his principles as a king, rather than to his moral character as a man. However in the latter ſenſe alſo, the expreſſion is not inapplicable, if we duly conſider what is meant, by a perſon after God's own heart. It is the revealed will of God, that men approach him as ſelf condemned ſinners, expecting favour only in and through an appointed mediator: This doctrine, the whole religious ſyſtem of the Jews was made to declare, by a variety of emblems and types, uniting in the ſame general idea; conſequently, he only who heartly acquieſced in this mode of acceptance; was an acceptable worſhipper, *the man after Gods' own heart.* All other diſtinctions, are unknown in the plan of human ſalvation. The hero, and the coward, the decent, and the profligate, are blended in one common character, ſo far as reſpects the ground of juſtification before God. And not the great and magnanimous, in human eſtimation, but the ſelf abaſed believing heart, is alone of value in his ſight. As it is ſaid in another portion of ſcripture, Iſaiah Chap. lxvi. verſe 2. "to this man "will I look even to him who is of a contrite "ſpirit, and that trembleth at my word." On this principle alone, the ſcriptures are found conſiſtent; and no wonder that thoſe who read them with other views can diſcover nothing but contradiction, or abſurdity.

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Now Saul was not only inſenſible of, and indifferent to this important point, but he was a man of a fiery, unyielding temper; the very reverſe of the character deſcribed by the prophet; and what one would almoſt deem it impoſſible for a rational creature to be, he was a deliberate oppoſer of the counſels and deſigns of God. For by his own confeſſion, *Samuel* xxiv. 20. he was convinced that David was appointed to ſucceed him in the throne; and yet he perſeveringly ſought his life, which in that caſe, muſt have been a deſperate attempt to diſannul, or circumvent the known purpoſe of the Almighty. From ſuch innate obliquity, what genuine virtues could proceed? Or is it reaſonable, that any outward actions, however ſpecious, could be acceptable to an infinite being who beheld the heart filled with enmity to himſelf? But in fact, the life of Saul was a ſerious offence againſt the laws of rectitude, and the feelings of humanity. We find him at one time, about to ſacrifice an amiable and valiant ſon, to a mere punctilio of honour; he had capriciouſly bound himſelf by a raſh, unneceſſary oath, which rather than repent of, or own himſelf in the wrong he would cover by a violation of the moſt ſacred ties both of nature and religion. The love of power, rendered him jealous, treacherous and cruel, as his long unremitting perſecution of David evin-

ces; in deſpite of approved innocence, the bond of conſanguinity, and the moſt ſolemn treaties. Political prudence, might approve this conduct in the eſtimation of ſome, but ſure I am, that both reaſon and religion, will denominate it habitual murder. And what ſhall we ſay, to the maſſacre of four-ſcore innocent, unreſiſting men; thoſe miniſters of the altar, which he ſacrificed in cool blood, to his jealous ambition, without even the formulary of inveſtigating the reality, or extent of their offence. After this, his conduct will ceaſe to create ſurprize, though the ſtate of his mind in his latter days, muſt excite at once our horror and commiſeration. It ſeems to have been that of the blackeſt deſpair, irritated by unbending pride, and implacable enmity to the Almighty. When the Lord in token of diſpleaſure, refuſed to anſwer his enquiries; no generous relentings, no becoming ſubmiſſion were diſcovered; but apparently in defiance of God, he reſolves to get information by the means which he had moſt ſtrictly forbidden, i e. magic. His ruſhing into battle, after being aſcertained of the event, and his ſubſequent ſuicide, bear a ſtriking reſemblance to circumſtances in the life of Brutus: We know in what light the character of the Roman, has been commonly regarded; but by the teſtimony of ſcripture to that of the jewiſh king, we learn that qualities moſt

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apt to excite the admiration of men, may really be the result of principles, which are held in abhorrence by the supreme judge of mankind.

In contrasting the character of David, with that of Saul, the difference appears striking and important. David sincerely accorded with the revealed will of God, and though he knew not how the blood of bulls and of goats, could take away sin; yet assured of the divine authority of the instituted religion, he rested therein with complacency and delight; relying on the faithfulness of its great author, to own and honour his own appointment; and in this disposition exists the essence of faith, that sole principle in man, which the Almighty will regard with favour. I mean not to palliate those heinous crimes, of adultery and murder committed by David in the matter of Uriah; though there is a wide difference between the casual act of transgression, and a rooted dislike to God and his law, such as habitually pervaded the mind of Saul: Nor did the justice of heaven, allow those crimes to pass unpunished. Besides the rebellion of Absalom, which David justly considered as the immediate dispenation of an offended God, his domestic peace was forfeited for ever; for according to the divine threatening, the sword never departed from his house; and the residue of his life, furnished an awful example

ample that although the ſin be pardoned, evil purſueth the ſinner. And here, the diſtinction of the two characters is eminently marked; both were conſcious of having incured the diſpleaſure of heaven, yet where one ſternly held out in malignant defiance, the heart of the other was "even like melt-"ing wax." Contemplate David in his exerciſes of penitential ſorrow, ready to give, not merely the blood of ten thouſand burnt offerings, had that been required; but to lay his own heart, broken, contrite and bleeding with remorſe, at the footſtool of mercy. And not only does he deplore his actual tranſgreſſion, but the inward depravity from whence it proceeded: "Waſh "me throughly from my wickedneſs, and "cleanſe me from my ſin, create in me a "clean heart, and renew a right ſpirit with-"in me."

With the humility of genuine contrition, he ſubmits to, and juſtifies God in his corrections, even under the moſt humiliating and diſtreſſing tokens of his diſpleaſure. View him aſcending mount Olivet, barefoot and in ſackcloth; thus publickly confeſſing his apprehenſions of and acquieſcence in the manifeſted juſtice of the Lord. In this and other traits of his character, you behold *the man after Gods' own heart*; that is to ſay, a ſelf abaſed ſinner, relying for ſalvation only on the promiſed mercies of God.

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On this principle, the divine preference of David, was conformable to ſtrict juſtice. Thence, an inſpired writer, who lived to ſee the complete developement of that myſtery of grace, of which the jewiſh religion was a figurative delineation; declares, that "if "we confeſs our ſins, he is faithful and juſt "to forgive us our ſins, and to cleanſe us "from all unrighteouſneſs." i. John, 1. 9. This view of the human character, may perhaps be contrary to the general ideas of mankind; nevertheleſs it is the definition of the Bible; and whether it be fitting that the rule of acceptance be preſcribed by the Creator, or the creature, let reaſon determine. However in this view, the conſiſtency of ſcripture is demonſtrable; the hiſtorical harmonizes with the doctrinal part, and the whole affords that clue to the underſtanding, by which the diſpenſations of God, are found congenial with our rational preconceptions of his wiſdom, juſtice and holineſs. Without this clue, man is the moſt inexplicable object in the viſible creation; and the moral world an enigma, too abſtruſe for the keeneſt intellect to ſolve. But with it, all is light, and the moſt illiterate believer in revelation, ſees further into the reaſon of things, than the ſhrewdeſt proficient in the ſchools of ancient, or modern philoſophy.

If it be aſked, wherefore the Almighty choſe Saul to the kingly office, whoſe diſpoſition

poſition was in all reſpects, ſo unſuitable to the office; I anſwer, that probably it was with a view to wean the Iſraelites, from an attachment to the inſtitutions and cuſtoms, of the neighbouring nations; and to convince them by experience, that an innovation of their conſtitution, would be diſaſtrous to themſelves and their king. Accordingly we find by the ſubſequent hiſtory, that a deviation from their national inſtitutes was ever productive of public calamity, till at length the general corruption of religion, brought on the ruin of their civil ſtate, by the Babyloniſh captivity. And here, I beg leave briefly to expreſs my conviction of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God, as operating on the broad ſcale of univerſal philanthropy; for while this diſpenſation would be to the Jews, a new and irrefragable proof of the divine authority of Moſes, and ſucceeding prophets, the diſperſion of this people into all parts of the Eaſt, would diſſeminate ſuch outlines of divine truth, as could not fail eventually to prepare the minds of mankind, for the reception of goſpel doctrines. And thus I ſee in the dealings of God towards this people, ſuch a minute agreement of moral events, with his purpoſes concerning our race, revealed at the beginning of time, as convinces me that the Jews were indeed the peculiar people of God; choſen to that relation, not for their

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own ſakes, but to the end, that in them the truth and will of Deity might be illuſtrated for the uſe and benefit of all deſcriptions, and generations of mankind. And therefore, I muſt believe that to be of God, which ſo well comports, with the beſt ideas I can form, of his wiſdom and moral government.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION, OF THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

I ſuppoſe them to be no detached, or ſeparate compoſition; but a continuation, or completion of a plan, exiſting in the infinite Mind from eternity; and ſketched in the inſtitutions of revealed religion, through all ages of human exiſtence; but clearly unfolded to the apprehenſion of all mankind, by the writings of the new teſtament.

WHENCE DO YOU DRAW THIS CONCLUSION?

From the manifeſt agreement of the new teſtament, with the old, in doctrine and ſcope. I find this agreement, in the views which both preſent of the divine character, of human nature, of the way of acceptance, and of moral obligation; in all which reſpects, the new teſtament teaches nothing novel, or that was not apprehended by the worſhippers of the true God, in all ages; though with leſs perſpicuity. So that the chriſtian church, built on the apoſtolic writings, differs not in principle, from the

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Jewiſh church eſtabliſhed on the writings of Moſes. The one conſiſted of the ſpiritual worſhip of God; through a Mediator which ſhould come; the other, is the adoration of the ſame God, through a Mediator actually revealed: And both fundamentally reſt, on the charter of redemption granted to our firſt parents, by the promiſe, that *the ſeed of the woman ſhould bruiſe the ſerpents' head.* Thoſe perſons therefore, do greatly err, who imagine that the Almighty hath preſcribed different principles of religion to his people, at various periods of time: It is true, the jewiſh ceremonial, is ſuperſeded by the goſpel; but ſuperſeded only, as the twilight, gives place to the clear day. The faith, both of jews and chriſtians, ſubſtantially terminates in the ſame point; and their moral obligations alſo, for the law given from Mount Sinai, is I perceive the root of all Goſpel precepts. Or rather, the latter is the ſpiritual expoſition of the former. Therefore, I am convinced that the books of the old and new teſtament, have one divine ſpirit, for their author; ſeeing that they concur, in the ſame views of ſacred truth, and tend to effect the ſame general end and deſign.

HOW ARE YOU CERTAIN, THAT JESUS OF NAZARETH IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH?

I am aſſured of this, in the firſt place, by certain characteriſtic marks, exactly agreeing with the prophetic deſcriptions of the Meſſiah, which are found in the old teſtament. Firſt, with reſpect to the order of time, in which he ſhould appear on earth. Jacob had predicted, that the legiſlative authority ſhould be veſted in the tribe of Judah, until the manifeſtation of the Meſſiah. "The ſceptre ſhall not depart from "Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his "feet till Shiloh come." Geneſis, Chap. xlix. verſe 10. Of this tribe, were the kings of Judah; and after the return of the Jews from the Babyloniſh captivity, whatever meaſure of judicial authority was enjoyed by them, the adminiſtration was principally veſted in one of this tribe; till the Romans conferred the kingly dignity on Herod Antipas, an Idumean by birth, in whoſe reign Jeſus Chriſt was born. The prophet Daniel, had fixed the period of the Meſſiah's manifeſtation, at the end of ſeventy weeks of years; which dating from the iſſuing of Cyru's edict for rebuilding Jeruſalem, ſignify in prophetic language the ſpace of 490 years; at the expiration of which the birth of our Lord took place.

Secondly, the genealogy of Chriſt. This had been fixed by Jacob, in the forementioned chapter, to the tribe of Judah. And after the acceſſion of David to the throne, who

was of that tribe, it was declared by all the prophets that the Meſſiah ſhould deſcend from him, And here, I ſee the reaſon, why by the civil conſtitution of the Jews, each tribe was to poſſeſs a diſtinct diſtrict in Canaan. We might have thought, a promiſcuous diviſion of the land, had been as well; but the Almighty, to whoſe comprehenſive view, the plan of redemption was preſent, had a peculiar motive for ſuch command; for by the genealogical exactneſs, which this diſpoſition of property required, the pedigree of the Redeemer was clearly aſcertained, it appearing by the public regiſter, that he actually deſcended from David in a direct line.

Thirdly, the birth place of the Meſſiah. This it had been foreſeen by the prophet Micah, ſhould be at the little city of Bethlehem; which was alſo the place of David's nativity. Nazareth, was the reſidence of Joſeph and Mary; but they being neceſſitated to repair to Bethlehem, on a public occaſion explained by Luke, in that city the Saviour of men was born.

Fourthly, the character and conduct of the Meſſiah. The prophet Iſaiah had declared that he ſhould be a man of ſorrows and acquainted with grief; deſpiſed and rejected of men; ſmitten of God and afflicted; and who can read the hiſtory of our bleſſed Lord, as drawn up by the four evangeliſts, without acknowledging the ſtriking ſimilitude of circumſtances

circumſtances to the prediction. Deſtitute of any of thoſe external blandiſhments which attract the admiration of the multitude, he indeed " bore our infirmities and carried " our ſorrows," in his benevolent boſom: Every where enduring the contempt of mankind, and a ſtranger to the comforts, nay to the ordinary accommodations of human life. Again his perſevering meekneſs and patience, anſwered to the prophetic deſcription, " he was led as a ſheep to the ſlaugh- " ter, and as a Lamb dumb before his ſhearers, ſo opened he not his mouth;" how eminently was this diſpoſition exemplified in the conduct of Jeſus, both under the contumelious treatment he experienced through life, and during the whole of his bitter paſſion when condemned to an ignominious and painful death. The prophet alſo had foreſeen the nature of his employment and miniſtry on earth: He was to preach the goſpel to the poor, to bind up the broken hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captive ſoul; to reſtore ſight to the blind, and heal the diſorders of mankind. It was alſo foretold, that the Lord would make his ſoul an offering for ſin, that he ſhould be cut off from the earth, and ſmitten for the tranſgreſſion of his people, and the 22d Pſalm points to the circumſtances of the Redeemer's ſufferings and death, with aſtoniſhing minuteneſs, even to the words uttered by him on the croſs;

yet Iſaiah declared that he ſhould ſee of the travail of his ſoul and be ſatisfied and the pleaſure of the lord ſhould proſper in his hands: This with many other prophecies had ſpeedily an accompliſhment in the ſpread of the goſpel over every part of the then known world, within fifty years after our Lord's crucifixion. In fine, there are ſo many marks laid down by one or another of the ſacred writers, to enable mankind to identify the perſon and work of the promiſed Meſſiah, that we are compelled to ſay: If Jeſus of Nazareth in whom they were ſo remarkably anſwered, be not he who ſhould come, it is in vain for us to look for another.

But further, I am ſatisfied in this point by the declaration of angels to the Shepherds, at the nativity of Chriſt; by the ſymbolic deſcent of the holy ſpirit on him at his baptiſm, and a voice from heaven audibly atteſting his perſon and office; by the tranſfiguration on the mount, and by the divine power which accompanied his words and actions, But finally, I know the Lord Jeſus Chriſt to be the true Meſſiah by his reſurrection from the dead, by which he was declared to be the ſon of God with power; by his viſible aſcenſion into heaven and the ſubſequent effuſion of the holy ſpirit, as the grand demonſtrative proof that God the father had accepted his work of human redemption.

HOW ARE YOU ASSURED THAT THOSE THINGS RECORDED OF JESUS CHRIST ARE REALLY TRUE?

I have all the evidence of this which the nature of moral fact can admit; for though the things mentioned are hiſtorically recorded by no more than four witneſſes, yet I find there were twelve perſons who unanimouſly atteſted the ſame facts, avowing that they had not only been the conſtant companions of Jeſus, and ſo eye witneſſes of his miracles, but that they had eat and drank with him after he aroſe from the dead; and this teſtimony they made it their buſineſs to declare to all the world, not during the ſpace of a limitted time, or upon ſome particular occaſion, but conſtantly, at all times, and in all places, without variation or reſerve.

But that nothing may be wanting to ſatisfy my mind reſpecting the validity of this evidence, I examine into the motives which could have induced this number of men to perſiſt in their teſtimony to the character and actions of Jeſus: Did they acquire popularity by proclaiming their maſters' name and hiſtory to the world; No, for the things they advanced were every where received with contempt and diſpleaſure. Nothing could have been more offenſive to the Jews in general, than the preaching of Jeſus of Nazareth, as the promiſed Meſſiah; and nothing could have ſounded more chimerical and ridiculous in the ears of a heathen,

than the doctrine of the croſs. Had the apoſtles promulgated ſome metaphyſical notion, they might have been heard with reſpect, but to offer ſalvation to men, through one who had been put to death as a criminal, was no probable means of attaining celebrity; and whatever treatment they might have looked for from the world, it is certain that experience ſoon convinced them, that the preaching of "Chriſt crucified was to the Jews a ſtumbling block, and to the Greeks fooliſhneſs."

Had they any pecuniary intereſts in view? No, for ſcarcely any paid reſpect to their doctrine, but of the lower orders in ſociety; and whatever property any of theſe might have poſſeſſed, they were ſure to ſuffer the loſs of all things, by taking up the profeſſion of chriſtianity: So that a mercenary ſpirit would not have choſen this line of purſuit. Could the apoſtles have aimed at authority? Were they promulgating tenets, approved by ſtate policy, and ſo might expect to worm themſelves into places, of honour and emolument? No, for the doctrines they declared, were moſt odious to the civil powers, in every country. It is evident then, that they could expect no advantages, by the conduct they had adopted. But did they incur any loſs? Yes, the loſs of every thing dear and valuable, in the eſtimation of a ſocial being; both domeſtic happineſs, and civil protection.

protection. Bonds, ſtripes and impriſonment, every where awaited them; perſecuted from city to city, as the offscouring of all things; they daily hazarded their lives for the name of Jeſus; and at laſt, chearfully embraced martyrdom rather than renounce him; or in the ſmalleſt degree, retract the teſtimony they had borne concerning him. Now is it poſſible to think, that twelve poor illiterate men, would under ſuch circumſtances, unite in maintaining a forgery? Or is it poſſible to believe, that any twelve men could be found on earth, be their qualifications, or degree, what it might; who would unanimouſly agree in ſupporting a known falſhood, in oppoſition to the rage and power, of all the civil authorities in the world; and that without the leaſt variation in their teſtimony. I will venture to ſay, the thing is abſolutely incompatible with human nature. Nothing but truth itſelf, could effect this. Or rather I ſhould ſay, truth, aſſiſted by the ſupernatural aid of its divine author; for mere humanity, even in a good cauſe, muſt have been unequal to the taſk, appointed to thoſe holy men. If then the moral certainty of any thing was ever demonſtrated, the truth of the goſpel hiſtory is ſo. And if demonſtrated, then reaſon draws the inference, that he who aroſe from the dead; viſibly aſcended into heaven; and ſent down ſupernatural

pernatural gifts of the holy ſpirit on his followers; can be none other than the true Meſſiah, the ſon of God bleſſed for evermore.

HAVE ANY PAGAN WRITERS, CORROBORATED THE EVENTS RECORDED BY THE EVANGELISTS?

Yes, as many of them, as might be expected to have fallen under general obſervation.* The taxation, which brought Joſeph and Mary to Bethlehem, is mentiond by ſeveral Roman hiſtorians; as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dion. The extraordinary meteor, which guided the eaſtern ſages to our Saviour, is recorded by Chalcidius. Herod's extreme jealouſy of his ſucceſſor, ſo as to ſuggeſt a ſlaughter of innocent children, and among them two of his own ſons, is mentioned by Macrobius; as a thing generally known. The ſupernatural darkneſs, and great earthquake, which happened at the time of our Lord's crucifixion, is allowed by Phlegon, a roman pagan. Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, under whom Jeſus Chriſt was crucified; recorded that event, in the account of his adminiſtration tranſmitted to the emperor; which record was extant, about an hundred years after

* The following teſtimonies, are recited on the authority of Mr. Addiſon; by whoſe writings, ſome ideas in this part of the work are ſuggeſted.

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that time, as appears by its being quoted by Juſtin Martyr, in a public diſpute with the Philoſophers at Rome.

Tertullian alſo, one of the moſt ſkilful lawyers and learned men of his time, refers to the ſame record about fifty years after. The exiſtence, and nature of the chriſtian religion, is mentioned by Pliny the younger, about ſeventy years after our Saviours death; in terms which accord to the accounts given of it by the new teſtament writers. And that St. Peter performed many miracles; and that devils, and evil ſpirits were ſubject to the firſt planters of chriſtianity, is allowed by Porphyry and Julian; thoſe moſt bitter enemies to the cauſe.

HAVE YOU ANY OTHER CORROBORATIVE TESTIMONY, TO THE TRUTH OF OUR SAVIOURS' HISTORY?

Yes, I conceive the great body of learned pagans, who embraced chriſtianty during the firſt centuries, forms a ſtrong collateral evidence of this truth. If any deſcription of men, not immediately eye witneſſes of the things related of our Saviour; can be ſuppoſed competent to decide on the validity of the evidences offered, without doubt theſe men were eminently ſo. As muſt be apparent to reaſon, when all circumſtances are duly conſidered. They were perſons, who to ſhining natural abilities, had added all the educational advantages, which the poliſhed

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ages of Greece and Rome afforded. For chriſtianity you know, was not promulgated under the auſpices of ignorance; but had its riſe at a period, when every ſpecies of intellectual attainment, was generally and ſucceſsfully cultivated. When men were inured to mental labour, and accuſtomed to the ſevereſt exerciſes of their rational powers. Thoſe learned heathens therefore, whoſe names are recorded among the early converts, and boldeſt champions of chriſtianity; were not likely to yield implicit belief, to doctrines which they had not examined: Eſpecially, when the bare profeſſion of them, was fatal to every ſecular intereſt, and contrary to the general tide of opinion. It has been but too common in latter ages, for people to receive the chriſtian faith as a ſort of hereditary notion; which they were rather concerned to venerate, than examine. But with an ancient Greek, or Roman, the caſe was widely different: By ſuch a one, chriſtianity would be not viewed, not only as a novel thing; but as that which he had been accuſtomed to regard, in the moſt unfavourable light. When therefore any extraordinary incident broke the force of his prejudices, all the energies of reaſon would be rouzed, to arreſt and examine the belief which was likely to enſue. In thoſe caſes, the attention was firſt attracted by the conduct of the primitive chriſtians. When thoſe heathens

heathens beheld the full force and efficacy, of the chriſtian religion, breaking the ferocity of barbariſm, and refining the illiterate and abandoned to a high degree of moral excellence; but moſt eſpecially, when in the chriſtian martyr, they ſaw that contempt of pain and death, which all the labours of philoſophy had been ineffectual to produce; and this not in one inſtance, but in thouſands, of all ages, ſex and conditions; they were led to conſider the nature of a religion, which was thus capable of exalting human nature. Contemplating, the mind of an honeſt pagan, in all the ſtages of ſuch inquiry, from the firſt emotion of admiration, to final conviction and belief, we muſt ſuppoſe a proceſs, very different from the lukewarm reſearches of modern examiners. Every argument, would be viewed in all poſſible varieties of aſpect, and no concluſion addmitted, but what was carried home to the mind by the irreſiſtible impulſe of truth. But here the ſober inquirer would be aſſiſted by advantages peculiar to that early period: I mean, opportunities of tracing the received opinions, to their immediate ſource; the apoſtles, and companions of Jeſus. For the claſs of converts we are ſpeaking of, were in point of time, at no great remove from the fountain head of information: And by local ſituation, not very remote from the ſcene

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of thoſe tranſactions, which were the ſubject of their inveſtigation.

Adding therefore, thoſe peculiar advantages, to the weight of intellectual ability poſſeſſed by thoſe perſons, and on the other hand, duly conſidering the ſtrong oppoſition of their intereſts and prejudices; we are obliged to confeſs, that had the hiſtory of Jeſus Chriſt been an impoſture, or in any degree tinctured with miſtake or ſuperſtition, it could not poſſibly have eſcaped detection by this deſcription of inquirers. Therefore I conclude, that the converſion of thoſe learned pagans, is in a collateral view, to be regarded as indiſputable evidence that the goſpel hiſtory, as recorded by the Evangeliſts, is true in all its parts.

But it is one thing, to have a conviction that the hiſtory of Chriſt's life and ſufferings is true, and another thing to poſſeſs that faith in him which is eſſential to ſalvation; for the bittereſt enemies of chriſtianity, as Julian, and others, never pretended to deny the reality of the facts, recorded by the new teſtament writers. But a belief in the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity, was alone that ſpecies of faith, which could induce a man to renounce all his worldly intereſts, and even life it ſelf, for the goſpels' ſake. As many of thoſe learned heathens did; and all of them were obliged to reckon upon doing, when they embraced chriſtianity. By the

the peculiar doctrines of chriſtianity, I mean, the fundamental principle, that Jeſus Chriſt is that true and only mediator between God and man, by whom we have acceſs to God, for all things neceſſary to the attainment of eternal life. And the proof of this to them, would be the extraordinary gifts of the holy Ghoſt; which our Lord himſelf had promiſed, as the atteſtation of God to his Mediatorial work and character. And this proof was connected with ſenſible evidence; for the apoſtles and firſt planters of chriſtianity, diſplayed in every place, this ſeal of their divine miſſion. On every ſide demons were ſubdued, diſeaſes inſtantaneouſly healed, and the dead raiſed by the exerciſe of faith, in a riſen Saviour. Thoſe intelligent heathens, had therefore abundant opportunities, of examining the reality of thoſe things; as they were in all reſpects qualified to diſtinguiſh the operation of divine power, from enthuſiaſm, or impoſture of any kind. And we have all the reaſon in the world, to be ſatisfied with their deciſion; ſince if they entered on their examination, under any prepoſſeſſing idea, it certainly was not in favour of chriſtianity; and they were rather deſirous of detecting a deluſion, than to aſcertain a real miracle. We muſt then admit, that in ſuch caſes converſion was the reſult of rational conviction, that the religion of Jeſus was the great power of God.

And though it is not poſſible to conceive, that the profeſſion of chriſtianity, could have been adopted on any other grounds, at a period when it was attended with ſuch awful hazard; yet the example of perſons, eminent for learning and intellectual abilities, exchanging the eſteem and honours of the world, for an ignominious name, and a martyr's crown, muſt be allowed an evidence of the truth and excellence of chriſtianity; of infinitely more weight, than all the objections of modern ſcepticiſm, on the oppoſite ſide.

ARE THERE ANY STANDING EVIDENCES, IN FAVOUR OF THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT; SUCH I MEAN, AS RENEW THEMSELVES FROM AGE TO AGE?

The prophecies of the new teſtament furniſh this ſpecies of evidence. The preſent ſtate of the Jews, and their country Judea, has been, and ſtill is, an irrefragable argument, that the origin of chriſtianity is of him, to whoſe infinite mind all periods of time are preſent; and to whoſe over ruling providence, ſecond cauſes are ſubſervient. At the time, when our Lord foretold the deſtruction of Jeruſalem by the Romans, there was no apparent probability of ſuch an event; the priveleges enjoyed by the Jews, precluded any reaſonable ſubject of complaint, and had the contrary been the caſe,

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the moſt comprehenſive views of political wiſdom, would not have foreboded that exceſs of popular frenzy, which drew on the ſtate the rage and power of the Roman legions. Still leſs was it probable, that on ſuch an occaſion, the Romans would deviate from their uſual conduct, that they, who had uniformly reſpected the fine arts, would level the temple, that admired piece, of architecture, with the ground: Nor have followed their conqueſt, with that vindictive fury, which rendered the reduction of Paleſtine, an unparalleled deſolation. And what but a divine preſcience, could have foreſeen that the civil eſtate of the Jews, ſhould never be reſtored; conſidering their unconquerable attachment to the land, and religion of their forefathers: And that in their diſperſed condition, they have not only exiſted a diſtinct people, cheriſhing the hope and expectation of ſuch reſtoration; but that their number has always been very conſiderable, and a large proportion of the wealth of nations actually in their poſſeſſion. Yet, neither when the power of the Roman ſtate was broken, and their conquerors no longer in a condition to oppoſe them; nor at any ſucceeding criſis, have they been able to effect a reeſtabliſhment. Judea paſſed from the dominion of the Romans, to that of the Saracens; and we at the concluſion of the eighteenth century, behold it a province

of the Ottoman empire; and ſtill empty of its ancient proprietors. For travellers inform us, that there are fewer Jews to be found in paleſtine, than in any other country. And not only does the prophecy imply its being deſtitute of Jews, but Jeruſalem was to be trodden down of the Gentiles, for a given time. That is, by a people not profeſſedly of the viſible church; for ſo the term in ſcripture is uſed. Every one knows the attempt of the papal chriſtians, in a former age to wreſt this country from the hands of infidels; when in the paroxyſm of religious frenzy, thouſands of Europeans periſhed on the plains of Aſia; an awful monument of the folly, and impotency of man, when attempting to ſubvert the counſels of heaven. And if other circumſtances were wanting, the event of the cruſade, is alone ſufficient to ſhew, that the foreknowledge which decreed Jeruſalem to be trodden down of the Gentiles; was immediately connected with a power, able to guard the prophecy againſt all probable contingencies, or moral poſſibility.

That counterfeit chriſtianity, the abſurdity, and bloody diſpoſition of which, have furniſhed the moſt plauſible grounds of ſcepticiſm and infidelity; is itſelf, a wonderful proof of the divine inſpiration of the new teſtament. In ſeveral parts of which, that grand corruption of the goſpel, is predicted

dicted in terms ſo clear and characteriſtic, that we plainly ſee its exiſtence in Popery; or that ſyſtem of ſpurious chriſtianity, which has extenſively prevailed for more than a thouſand years, to the diſgrace both of reaſon and humanity. While agreeable to the predictions of our Lord, his true diſciples, that is, thoſe who adhered to the goſpel, in its genuine truths and ſimplicity, have been made to endure the moſt cruel perſecutions. A conſideration, which ſupplies another diſtinct proof, of the divine origin of chriſtianity; the bleſſed founder of which, expreſſly predicted that his religion, would be obnoxious to the hatred and rage of all men; "Ye "ſhall be hated of all men, for my names "ſake:" "Ye ſhall be brought before go-"vernors and kings, and ſome of you they "ſhall kill." With other expreſſions to the ſame purpoſe; all which were accompliſhed, not only during the firſt three centuries, but after the Roman empire became chriſtian; that is to ſay, when the papal power was eſtabliſhed on the ruins of the imperial; and when through a ſeries of ages, the ſeveral kings of the communion of the Romiſh church, uniformly employed their power, in the deſtruction of thoſe who maintained chriſtianity, on its native, evangelical principles. So that if Rome pagan, ſlew her thouſands of the faithful diſciples of Chriſt; Rome papal, has deſtroyed her tens of thou-

ſands. Which brings me to conſider, that the exiſtence of genuine chriſtianity at this day, is not only a ſtanding evidence of its divinity; but it is a perpetual miracle; that is, a perpetual effect, of ſupernatural power, conſtantly operating and engaged in its ſupport.

Our Lord, declared that his goſpel ſhould be preached in all the world; and that whatever were the rage and oppoſition of men, yet the gates of hell ſhould not prevail againſt it. Now this promiſe could never have been made good, had chriſtianity been no more than a human invention; as you muſt be convinced, by impartially conſidering all its attendant circumſtances. Firſt, as to its nature. Though pure, unadulterated chriſtianity, be virtually the cure of moral diſorder; yet in its immediate operation, it runs counter to the actual ſtate and tendency of human affairs. It calls off the mind, from the three main ſprings of influence; the luſts of dominion, wealth and pleaſure; with their ſeveral modifications, and varieties, which involve all the characters and purſuits of mankind. And though its directions run parallel with right reaſon, yet are they the reverſe of moral action in general; and for the moſt part ſtrike at the ruling paſſion of every individual, without offering any compenſation ſuited to the carnal taſte of men. It tends not to allure the multitude,

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by looſening the bonds of civil ſubjection, or holding forth levelling principles, with reſpect to the temporal affairs of life. It leaves the world, as it finds it, and propounds no advantages, but ſuch as are not appreciated by the corporeal ſenſes. Reflect I pray you, that this ſyſtem was propoſed to mankind, by twelve men of inferior rank in ſociety; of mean occupations, and indigent circumſtances; with minds unfurniſhed by ſcientific learning, unrefined by philoſophy, and unacquainted with the arts of perſuaſion. Could you have expected that they would be heard with attention by any; ſave perchance, a few ſolitary beings detached from the common intereſts of ſocial life? Proceed, if you pleaſe, and view thoſe preachers every where oppoſed by the civil authorities. Interdicts, anathemas, and perſecutions; even unto death, levelled at any who ſhould eſpouſe their doctrine; and will you then think it poſſible, that the maſs of ſociety ſhould regard them with attention? Yet behold their religion gaining ground in all places, and among all ranks and deſcriptions of people; and at length becoming triumphant over popular opinion, and the ſuperſtitions of ages. Do you diſcern herein, nothing more than an ordinary effect of a common cauſe? Rather, confeſs that you ſee an effect, ſo contrary to the common courſe of things, that you are compelled to look for

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its correſpondent cauſe, " beyond the viſi " ble diurnal ſphere."

But an oppoſition, more fatal to the intereſts of chriſtianity than any before encountered, was prepared by the ſelfiſh policy of hypocritical profeſſors; deviſing to make gain of godlineſs, and perverting the goſpel itſelf, to the baſe ends of ſordid ambition. For ſcarcely, was the triumph over paganiſm attained, which we have juſt noticed, than the corrupt ſyſtem, already mentioned began to work. One accommodating principle, after another, was admitted; till at length that union of chriſtian, forms, with worldly policy was effected, which long uſurped an empire over the reaſon and conſciences of men, under the ſpecious title of the holy roman catholic church: But more properly, the nurſe of ſuperſtition, and the mother of all unholy doctrines. Would you ſee the true church of Chriſt, to which he had annexed the promiſe of perpetuity, during this antichriſtian uſurpation; you muſt ſearch for it, not as rearing its mitred head in courts and parliaments; not in cities, and places of renown; but in the vallies of Piedmont, in Languedoc, and a few remote ſpots, ſequeſtered from public obſervation. There humble, ſmall, and unknown, it continued to exiſt; while her rival and counterfeit, tyrannized over the whole civilized world.

And

And when we advert, to the havoc made of this little body of faithful witneſſes, by bloody Maſſacres, by Inquiſitions, and civil proſcriptions; it is matter of the greateſt aſtoniſhment, that a veſtige thereof ſhould remain. But at length, after a long and diſmal night of popiſh darkneſs; it was clearly evinced, that the gates of hell could not prevail againſt the goſpel church. Which after all the devaſtation it had ſuſtained, was brought forth to general obſervation, at the illuſtrious period of the reformation: And we now behold the commencement of that time, when agreeable to the whole tenor of ſcripture prophecy, the goſpel ſhall univerſally prevail, cleared of every popiſh gloſs, and antichriſtian corruption.

What ſtronger proof can you deſire, that chriſtianity is of God, than the conſtant diſplay of his power, in the ſupport and preſervation of it? If it be ſaid, that a falſe religion may have a rapid extenſion, and ſubſiſt for ages, as in the inſtance of Mahometiſm; this is granted; but conſider the genius of the two ſyſtems, and the means employed in their eſtabliſhment, and the difference will be obvious. Chriſtianity as before intimated, was not adapted to the corrupt paſſions of mankind. Mahometiſm, on the contrary, allured its converts by voluptuous indulgences, and while it preſcribed a mechanical routine of religious exer-

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ciſes, provided for its votaries a ſenſual life, and a carnal heaven. Mahometiſm however, made comparatively but little progreſs, until it was united with military power: Its extenſion was by the ſword; for whereever the Saracens carried their victorious arms, they left the vanquiſhed no alternative, but death, or the creed of the conquerors. We know that men called chriſtians, have alſo enforced our religion by the ſword; but as genuine diſciples of the meek and lowly Jeſus, we diſclaim all connection, with that counterfeit chriſtianity; and we affirm that the true ſpecies has never been propagated by coercion: But, that for more than a thouſand years, it has exiſted in oppoſition to all the conſtituted authorities, of the world. And I leave you to draw the inference, which thoſe well known facts muſt preſent to a thinking mind.

HOW CAN I BE ASSURED, THAT THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, DO CONTAIN THE DOCTRINES RECEIVED BY THE FIRST PROFESSORS OF THE GOSPEL?

There are ſufficient grounds of ſatisfaction in this reſpect. The learned world, finds abundant proofs that the four goſpels, were publiſhed within thirty years, after the death of Chriſt: And that the epiſtles, which are a commentary on the goſpels, or an application of firſt principles, to experience and practice; were received and read, in the

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public aſſemblies of chriſtians, in the ſecond century. With the exception only of the epiſtle to the Hebrews, the epiſtle of James, the ſecond epiſtle of Peter, the ſecond and third of John, that of Jude, and the Revelation of John. Which, though extant at that time, were not included in the canon of the new teſtament, till a later period. But as theſe, differ in nothing, from the doctrines of the other epiſtolary writings; the faith of chriſtians, is not affected by this circumſtance; and pious men afterwards found ſufficient proofs of their authenticity. And therefore, it being well known that the canon of the new teſtament, was for the moſt part, received by chriſtians of that early age, as the genuine writings of the apoſtles, and firſt preachers of the goſpel, men immediately inſpired by God to make known his truth; there are good grounds, why we ſhould reſt ſatisfied in this deciſion: Becauſe, if any deſcription of perſons, can be ſuppoſed competent judges in this caſe, certainly chriſtians of that period were ſo; as well by the circumſpection they would not fail to exerciſe on ſuch an occaſion, as by the peculiar advantages and opportunities enjoyed by them. It cannot reaſonably be imagined, that thoſe who had hazarded their lives for the goſpel's ſake; as all profeſſors then did; could in any degree be ignorant what that goſpel was. Or that thoſe who had ſtaked their all in the cauſe,

cauſe, would be careleſs what writings were impoſed on them, in ſo important a concern. Again, there was a conſtant communication, maintained between the primitive, churches, wherever planted, or however diſtant from each other; by which means, the detection of impoſture was eaſy and unavoidable. As for inſtance, if a writing relative to religion, appeared in any department of chriſtian ſociety; the original manuſcript would be demanded, and a ſtrict ſcrutiny made at what time, and from what hands, it had been received; and thus its claim to regard, be aſcertained not on preſumptive, but poſitive proof. Hence, forgeries were actually detected; and ſeveral writings, aſſuming the names of inſpired penmen, were rejected as ſpurious: Circumſtances, which furniſh to us as rational a concluſion, as can be drawn from the nature of things, that the books handed down to us are genuine; the written teſtimonies, of the firſt goſpel miſſionaries, to the doctrines which they had verbally taught. But although the atteſtation of the primitive church, in this reſpect is ſatisfactory and ſufficient to our belief; the validity of the doctrines contained in thoſe canonical books, depends not on this circumſtance; which at whatever period admitted into the church, muſt have harmonized with the original faith of chriſtians, or they could not have been received at all.

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It could, at no time have been poſſible, to perſuade the chriſtian world, that the goſpels contained a relation of facts " moſt ſurely " believed among them," if ſuch things had not been believed: Or to have paſſed on the public, a hiſtory of the riſe and progreſs of a religion, built on the very principles contained in thoſe books, if no ſuch religion had been known to exiſt. Or epiſtles addreſſed to reſpective churches, of this deſcription, in different cities as Rome, Epheſus, &c. if nobody had known of ſuch churches, or worſhipping ſocieties, having been planted there. So that in all points of view, we muſt be convinced that the books of the new teſtament, convey to us the genuine truths of chriſtianity. Seeing then, that we are in all points encompaſſed with evidences, which we cannot in conſiſtency with reaſon reject, let us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith, without wavering; for he is faithful that hath called us; and may the God of all grace, " who has cauſed all holy ſcripture to " be written for our learning, grant that we " may in ſuch wiſe hear them, read, mark " learn and inwardly digeſt them; that by " patience and comfort of his holy word, we " may embrace and ever hold faſt, the bleſ- " ſed hope of everlaſting life, which he has " given us in his ſon Jeſus Chriſt."

FINIS.

The Reader is desired to correct and excuse the following errors of the Press;

Page.	Line from the top.		
2	—12	*for* endowd	*read* endowed.
7	—9	— then	— than.
40	—8	— Charity benevolence	—Charity, benevolence,
ibid.	9	— lord -	— Lord.
55	—13	— Soverign	— Sovereign.
99	—10	— accord to	— accord with.

and any others he may notice.

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